TORONTO
PUBLIC
LIBRARIES
boys and girls house

THE OTHER CINDERELLA

No performance or reading of this play may be given unless a licence has been obtained in advance from the author's agent

CHRISTOPHER MANN LIMITED
140 PARK LANE, LONDON W. 1

The U.S.A. and Canadian amateur rights are handled by

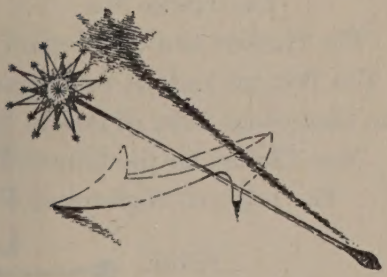
SAMUEL FRENCH INC.
25 WEST 45TH STREET
NEW YORK, N.Y., U.S.A.

to whom application should be made

Nicholas Stuart Gray

THE OTHER CINDERELLA

With due acknowledgements to all the earlier versions



Illustrated by
Joan Jefferson Farjeon

LONDON
OXFORD UNIVERSITY PRESS
1958

Oxford University Press, Amen House, London, E.C.4

GLASGOW NEW YORK TORONTO MELBOURNE WELLINGTON
BOMBAY CALCUTTA MADRAS KARACHI KUALA LUMPUR
CAPE TOWN IBADAN NAIROBI ACCRA

© NICHOLAS STUART GRAY 1958

First edition 1958

R 166733

Also by Nicholas Stuart Gray

Plays

Beauty and the Beast
The Tinder Box
The Hunters and the Henwife
The Princess and the Swineherd
The Marvellous Story of Puss in Boots
New Clothes for the Emperor
The Imperial Nightingale

Fiction

Over the Hills to Fabylon

TORONTO PUBLIC LIBRARIES
boys and girls house
R 10
3.5.67
NOV 26 1964

Printed by W. & J. Mackay & Co. Ltd., Chatham, Kent

A different Glass Slipper altogether—
to Eleanor, with love

SETTINGS

ACT ONE

Scene I The Edge of a Forest, evening

Scene II The Baronial Hall, later

ACT TWO

Scene I In another Forest, midnight

Scene II The Baronial Hall, the following day

ACT THREE

Scene I The Palace Gardens, that night

Scene II The Edge of the Forest, dawn

Scene III Outside the Forest, morning

PERIOD: THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY

CHARACTERS

in order of appearance

THE DEMON

THE FAIRY

CINDERELLA

THE PRINCE

DANNY

MELISSA

MELANIE

DAME MARGARET

THE BARON

BARNY

ACT I SCENE I

THE EDGE OF A FOREST, EVENING

The curtain rises on darkness. A dim green light flickers suddenly, dies away, and returns. Trees can now be seen, towering up into the night, and twisted bushes at their roots. A brighter gleam from far overhead, which just might be an eerie form of moonlight, reveals the glittering figure of the DEMON. *He is asleep, standing with his shoulder against a tree-trunk. He is very handsome, in a dubious way, and has great charm and sincerity. He is astonishingly human, as demons go. As the light still increases, he wriggles uncomfortably and wakes, casting a dazed look round about him.*

DEMON. Where am I? On the human earth again?
But in what place? And why? And also . . .
when?
My mind is blurred and foggy. What dread
hand

Conveyed me here, far from my demon land?
Where are my subjects? Dwarf, and troll, and gnome!
I'm here alone, and they've been left at home.
My bones begin to crinkle now with fright . . .
I know this story isn't going right!
Now pull yourself together, Demon, do!
The telling of the tale begins with you.
To plan . . . to scheme . . . my evil spells to spin . . .
Perhaps this time . . . for once . . . I'm going to win!

[*A beam of light streaks down and reveals the* FAIRY. *She blinks a little. She is absolutely enchanting. Small and scintillating with brightness, a creature of sunshine and joy, she is most endearing, and lovely. Her sincerity makes her rather touching, too. Her crown is diamond-dazzling, and she carries a little wand with a sparkling tip. Her power has never been seriously challenged, and she is quite at a loss when anything goes wrong. It will be absolutely fatal to this story if these two characters are not played with all possible glamour as the hero and heroine.*]

FAIRY [*ringingly*]. Never!

DEMON. Hallo.

FAIRY [*taken aback*]. Don't say 'hallo' to me!

DEMON. I never more was pleased my foe to see.

FAIRY. What can you mean? That line defeats me quite.
Demon, you look so strange! Are you all right?

DEMON. No, I'm scared stiff!

[*He is obviously speaking in prose. The* FAIRY

looks blank, and then tries to cover up his blunder. She smiles nervously.]

FAIRY. What could frighten you?
Unless it be the evil that you do?

DEMON. Look, Fairy . . . please . . . don't go on like that. Can't we just be natural?

FAIRY. Don't be so silly! What's the matter with you? You're spoiling everything.

DEMON. There's something wrong. Can't you feel it? This story isn't going according to plan.

FAIRY. It always does.

DEMON. This time it may be different. Or not the plan we know. Oh, don't just stand there glittering! Use your brain, if your crown conceals one.

FAIRY [*automatically*]. How dare you!

DEMON. I feel we're caught up in some sly wind that's blowing widdershins.

FAIRY. How you can talk like that . . .!

DEMON. Exactly! In the normal way I wouldn't be allowed. Someone, or something, would stop me. We've been speaking in prose for several minutes, and nobody's complained. It isn't right. [*Desperately.*] Fairy . . . we've been enemies for so many centuries . . . fought our battle of good and evil on so many fields . . . and this is the first time I've ever been afraid.

FAIRY [*uneasily*]. You're giving me the creeps! Nothing has happened yet. It's only the beginning.

DEMON. And already the angle has shifted.

FAIRY. I'm going back for instructions!

[*She moves away, but the* DEMON *catches her hand.*]

DEMON. No! No! Don't leave me!

FAIRY [*shaking him off*]. Are you mad?

DEMON. You're the only thing I understand here. Stay near me. Don't leave me in the dark! Have pity! According to tradition you are kind.

FAIRY [*thoughtfully*]. I don't feel traditional tonight.

DEMON. See what I mean? I'm right, aren't I? Haven't you a helpless feeling . . . as though you were swimming in treacle . . .?

FAIRY. An exact description. What shall we do?

DEMON. I suppose . . . try to keep it straight, if we can. We must stay on the usual lines, whatever happens. Nothing can harm us if we just do our duty to the best of our ability, as always. Only . . . we've got to stick together, or there'll be a complete shambles!

FAIRY. Oh, what a responsibility! If we go to pieces, anything could happen! Evil might triumph . . .

DEMON [*glumly*]. Improbable.

FAIRY [*in anguish*]. The Giant might eat Jack! The Beast destroy Beauty! And Cinderella might never go to the Ball . . .!

[*She stops abruptly, her hand to her mouth, and looks at the* DEMON. *They speak in unison.*]

DEMON. }
FAIRY. } Cinderella!

DEMON. So that's why we're here.

FAIRY. I'd forgotten till this moment.

DEMON. So had I. It's all slipping sideways again. I usually know my part.

FAIRY. Demon . . . dear Demon . . .

[*She moves closer to him as if for protection.*]

. . . we must try to keep our heads. I can't think what's going on, but whatever it is we must try to get

it back to normal. Oh, look how my hands are shaking!

DEMON. Don't be frightened.

FAIRY. I can't help it.

DEMON. It may turn out all right. Don't get too rattled. As you pointed out, nothing's happened yet. Courage, Fairy! Take a deep breath. Let's start again, as if nothing unusual . . .

[*He draws himself up.*]

Concentrate. Er . . . ah . . . I can think of nothing to say . . .

[*The* FAIRY *speaks determinedly, in a tiny, terrified voice.*]

FAIRY. You wicked Demon, I defy your power!
Your evil spells will never make me . . .
[*She looks at him helplessly. He prompts her.*]

DEMON. Cower.

FAIRY. Oh, thank you. Yes . . . cower . . .

DEMON. Ha! ha!

FAIRY [*flinching*]. Don't!

DEMON. I always do that.

FAIRY. It went through my head like a knife.

DEMON. Sorry.
[*He goes back to rhyme, more quietly.*]
Ha! Ha! I tell you, Cinderella's lost.

FAIRY. No! I will save her, at whatever cost.
I stand her guardian, and will never yield!
The power of goodness is her magic shield.

DEMON. You're sure of that?

FAIRY [*shaken*]. Almost.

DEMON. Well, we shall see!
Come, show this pure young innocent to me.
[*As the* FAIRY *hesitates, he relapses into prose.*]

Go on! Try.

FAIRY. My spells may not work.

DEMON. Things can't be that bad. Have a crack at it.
[*The* FAIRY *gives him a nervous glance, raises her wand, and says haltingly:*]

FAIRY. The power of magic I dare not doubt,
Upside-down, or inside-out . . .
Dust in the sky . . . moon in the cellar . . .
Answer my cry . . . show Cinderella!
[*She moves her wand slowly. And slowly part of the woodland becomes transparent.* CINDERELLA *is sitting by a hearth, crouched among the ashes. She is very young, and very pretty. Her long hair falls straight over her slender shoulders. She is bare-footed, and wears a ragged, though extremely becoming, dress. She is dabbing at her eyes with a handkerchief. The* FAIRY *and the* DEMON *exchange looks of relief.*]

DEMON. That's all right. Now we know where we are.
[CINDERELLA *rips her handkerchief in half, and throws it into the fire. Her face is distorted with rage. She shakes her fist furiously, and then buries her head in her hands. The vision fades. The wood is its stolid self again. The* DEMON *gives a deprecating cough.*]
Well . . . we must just do our best.
[*He crosses to the* FAIRY, *who stands rigid and stricken.*]
So, my fair enemy, within an hour
Young Cinderella will be in my power!

FAIRY. Perhaps she will . . . I don't know what to do . . .

DEMON. Come on, the next approach is up to you.

[*He puts a comforting arm round her shoulders. She jumps back, with a gasp of indignation. He grins.*]
I won't be far away.

FAIRY. I'm so perplexed:
And frightened numb of what may happen next!

DEMON. You mustn't cry; and never show your fear.
Remember . . . good must triumph. Courage, dear!

[*He pats her shoulder bracingly, and goes off, left. The moonlight brightens, until most of the eeriness has gone from the scene, and it is just an ordinary forest in the late evening. The* FAIRY *looks round her nervously. Then her attention is caught by something moving, away to the right.*]

FAIRY. She's coming. Oh, my goodness! I don't know what to say! She *looks* all right . . . perfectly sweet, and as pretty as a picture in a fairy-tale. I must collect my wits, now. First . . . my disguise. The usual, I think. Better keep it simple.

[*She looks up into the night sky, and waves her wand. A large grey cloak falls at her feet. She smiles wanly.*]

Thank you, ma'am.

[*She drapes the cloak round her, and stoops, so that she looks exactly like a fairy disguised as an old woman.* CINDERELLA *enters, down right. She is humming carelessly and she carries a small armful of twigs. She picks up another, and drops it into the bunch.*]

Er . . . my dear . . . oh . . . oh, please . . . do be my dear!

CINDERELLA [*haughtily*]. Did you speak?

FAIRY. Well, yes.

CINDERELLA. Then don't mumble. What did you say?

FAIRY. I said . . . my dear . . .

CINDERELLA. Meaning me?

FAIRY. I'm not talking to myself.

CINDERELLA. People who are mad always . . .

[*She stops abruptly, and stares at the hem of the glittering dress that shows below the* FAIRY'S *cloak. The latter follows her gaze, and crouches a little lower. Her eyes narrow.*]

Madam, I do beg your pardon. My mind was wandering.

[*She gives an unconvincing little laugh.*]

I was in a world of dreams . . . full of the fantasies of a young girl's mind! I didn't know what I was saying. If I was a trifle discourteous, please forgive me.

FAIRY. Hm.

CINDERELLA. Do you blame me for fleeing from reality into fairyland? When one is extremely unhappy, one must do one's best to cope with one's miserable lot, mustn't one?

FAIRY. What exactly is the matter with one?

CINDERELLA [*furiously*]. Don't you dare laugh at me!

[*She stops herself, glances again at the dress-hem, and softens her voice.*]

Alas, poor little Cinderella! How misery can change one's . . . my nature! Once I was the sweetest and happiest of all creatures. Tender, and loving, and loved . . .

[*The* FAIRY *misses the genuine note of pathos in her voice and words.*]

FAIRY. Who said so?

CINDERELLA. Everyone said so! My mother said . . . my mother . . .

[*She gives a pathetic and sincere sob.*]

FAIRY. Oh, my poor child! Is your mother . . .?

CINDERELLA. She's dead! She's dead! And I'm alone. My father neglects me . . . my stepmother despises me . . . my stepsisters hate me! And I hate you!

FAIRY [*startled*]. What!

CINDERELLA [*in a storm of tears*]. Hate you! Hate you! Dressed up as a poor old woman, to trap me! And all the time, you're a powerful fairy, with wishes in your pockets and magic in your eyes! If I was good, and sweet, and polite, you'd reward me. Well, I'm not! I'm horrible. And I don't believe in magic! And I don't care! Everyone's against me, so you you may as well join them. Do you think I mind? Hear me laugh . . . ha, ha!

[*She flings her bundle of firewood at the* FAIRY'S *feet and runs off, right, laughing bitterly and loudly. The* FAIRY *remains quite still. She seems stunned. The* DEMON *enters thoughtfully from the left. There is a pause.*]

DEMON [*at last*]. Tricky.

FAIRY. Now what?

DEMON. Carry on, I suppose.

FAIRY [*coming to life*]. I will not! I'll do absolutely nothing for her! She's a thoroughly nasty little girl. Is it my business to guard and protect a creature like that?

DEMON. Since you ask, I would say yes.

FAIRY. I beg your pardon!

DEMON. You are, in the nature of things, a guardian.

FAIRY. Of the innocent and good.

DEMON. She is more defenceless than they.

FAIRY. What are you saying?

DEMON. If you refuse to help her, my task's too easy. A walk-over without parallel in legend. And you will have surrendered to the powers of evil . . . for the very first time.

FAIRY. Oh no!

DEMON [*sternly*]. You give in too soon. This Cinderella needs you. Far more than the virtuous young ladies you usually handle. And, what's more, if you're going to leave her to her fate—cast her defenceless into my clutches . . . abandon her to the forces of darkness—just because you don't like her . . . then you're not the good fairy I've admired and respected all these centuries.

FAIRY [*rallying*]. It's absolutely unheard-of for you to speak to me like that! And worse . . . you're right! If I must be taught my duty by a demon, things have indeed come to a pretty pass.

[*She moves firmly into rhyme.*]

I shall attend my business, come what may.
Defiance, fiend! [*Pleadingly.*] You won't be
far away?

DEMON. Fear not, for I am in the struggle, too.

FAIRY. What happens next?

DEMON. I've not the slightest clue.
Ah, look! The Prince approaches! Charming,
eh?
He mustn't see me, so I'll haste away.
[*He gives the* FAIRY *a hurried but elegant bow, and goes off, left. She heaves a weary little sigh.*]

FAIRY. I've never ever been unsettled so.
I don't remember how the plot should go!

[*The* PRINCE *enters from the right, accompanied by his equerry, Captain the Earl of Dannett, known as* DANNY. *The* PRINCE *is a very handsome, romantic-looking young man. Tall and splendid in hunting costume, he wears a narrow gold crown on his dark head.* DANNY *is in uniform, and is fair, good-looking, and cheerful. The* PRINCE, *for all his somewhat vague expression, is far more practical and observant than his friend. They are both very attractive. They see the* FAIRY, *and halt. The* PRINCE *bows, and* DANNY *sweeps off his hat.*]

PRINCE. Good evening, good lady.

FAIRY. Oh . . . yes . . . of course—good evening.

PRINCE. You seem troubled. Are you lost?

FAIRY. Not the way you mean!

DANNY. And you've dropped your firewood. I'll collect it for you.

[*He kneels to gather up the twigs at the* FAIRY'S *feet. The* PRINCE *smiles, and helps him. The* FAIRY *eyes their efforts without marked enthusiasm.*]

FAIRY. Very thoughtful. Which of you is the Prince?

PRINCE. Why need you ask, madam?

DANNY. He who wears the crown.

FAIRY. In my experience, princes are disguised as often as not.

PRINCE. What for?

FAIRY. I've never found out.

[*They hand her an untidy collection of twigs, which she accepts rather unwillingly.*]

Thank you so much.

PRINCE. Are you sure you haven't got off the track?

FAIRY. I'm sure of nothing.

DANNY. Perhaps we can set you on the road again?

FAIRY. At least you restore my confidence. I do thank you! For the moment I don't need your help. Good luck be with you, Prince Charming, and Dan . . .

PRINCE. My name is Charles. And this is Captain the Earl of Dannett.

FAIRY. Oh. Yes . . . well, I must be going. We shall meet again, if anything works out according to plan. Tell me . . . you . . . you haven't some ulterior motive for your kindness?

PRINCE. You are an old lady, madam. Therefore my services are at your disposal.

[*He bows low to her. She sighs with relief.*]

FAIRY. Thank goodness someone knows the right answers.

[*She goes off, right. The two young men watch her.*]

PRINCE. Poor thing, she seemed bemused, and troubled in her mind.

DANNY. We offered to help.

PRINCE. I was interested in your offer, Danny. To set her on the road. Do you know where it is? Of course not. We've lost the hunt, the horses, the hounds . . . and now, it would seem, our heads! You'd have looked a fool, if she'd accepted your kind help.

DANNY. You're the fool, sir . . . begging your pardon. I knew what I was doing, all right. And she gave us good luck. Didn't you notice the robe below her cloak? She was magic.

PRINCE. I'm not completely blind.

CURTAIN

ACT I SCENE II

THE BARONIAL HALL, LATER

There is a carved stone fireplace, right, with a cowl above it on which is painted a shield with the baronial arms. There is a stool on the hearth, and a large chair down right. A cat lies curled into a tight, black, velvet knot on the fur rug in front of the fire. At the back, in the centre of the wall, are great double doors. Left of these is an arched window. An oak table, and a couple of chairs, up left, and below them an arched doorway.

The room is gay and cheerful, with candles burning, and copper and brass ornaments reflecting the glow of the fire. MELISSA *stands by the doors, centre. She holds the left-hand one slightly ajar. She is twenty years old; a forthright young person, easily aroused to indignation by injustice or cruelty, and as easily moved to swift pity and forgiveness. She is not particularly beautiful, but neither is she plain She is charming to look at, and so is her elder sister.* MELANIE *is twenty-three. She is*

sitting on the stool by the fire, polishing some brass. She is a very gentle girl, with grace and dignity. These, believe it or not, are the stepsisters of CINDERELLA, *and they are very nice indeed.*

MELISSA. The wind's getting colder and colder. It'll snow before midnight. Where's she got to, this time?

MELANIE. I was afraid of this.

MELISSA. Oh, I know! It's all my fault, and you're perfectly right to blame me.

MELANIE [*calmly*]. I don't.

MELISSA. Well, I do! I was stupid. But I truly didn't mean to upset her.

MELANIE. Who does?

MELISSA. She twists our words into needles. Then pricks her finger on them, and weeps! I said this was a nice fire—an idle remark, if ever I made one!—and she wailed that I grudged her warmth for her frozen hands . . . and went rushing out into the dark, saying she was being forced to gather her own firewood!

MELANIE. You might have known she would.

MELISSA. Melanie, have I ever grudged her anything!

MELANIE [*smiling*]. Shut the door, dear. Barny will find her.

MELISSA. If I do, she may say I've barred her from her own home.

MELANIE. She'll probably say that anyway, so we might just as well keep the room warm.

[MELISSA *takes a last look outside, and reluctantly closes the door. She crosses to her sister, and takes up a polishing cloth.*]

MELISSA. Why on earth did Mother marry the Baron!

MELANIE. Because he's a dear, and needs looking after. Heaven knows this place was like a pigsty!

MELISSA. And would be still, if we didn't work like kitchen-maids.

MELANIE. Melissa . . . do you mind terribly?

MELISSA. No . . . oh, no! Melanie, I didn't mean that! I know we can't keep servants here . . . because of *her*. Though I don't really see that a little more gossip would hurt! She's spread tales enough among the tradespeople to make the whole world think we're monsters . . . or that she's raving mad!

MELANIE. Melissa, don't say that.

MELISSA. Sometimes I think she'll drive herself to it.

[MELANIE *puts down her brass-cleaning, and leans forward to speak earnestly to her sister, who has dropped to her knees on the hearth-rug.*]

MELANIE. We've got to do our best to draw her back from such a path. I know it isn't easy. But, Melissa . . . sometimes I've seen a little glimmer in her eyes . . . a desire for affection . . . a beginning of laughter. She's walking in the twilight . . . it isn't yet the darkness . . . and secretly I think she longs for morning. If patience can bring it for her, then I, for one, will polish the brass, and cook the meals, and wash up dishes . . .

MELISSA [*laughing*]. And sweep the floors, and feed the cat, and shake the mat, and grind the corn . . .

MELANIE. }
MELISSA. } And keep the house that Jack built!

[*Through the arched door, down left, comes* DAME MARGARET, *their mother. She is a cosy, buxom woman in her forties. She is pretty, and dignified,*

and very understanding. Her manner, though gentle, is authoritative when necessary.]

MARGARET. Is Ellen back yet?

MELISSA. Barny's gone to look for her.

MELANIE. She can't be far off, Mother.

MARGARET. I hope not. She shouldn't be running about in the dark. There might be a witch or something!

MELISSA. I'd back Cinderella.

[MARGARET *sits in the chair by the fire.*]

MARGARET. I wish you wouldn't call her by that silly name, dear.

MELISSA. She told us to. We've been ordered!

[*She gives a spirited imitation of* CINDERELLA *at her most tiresome.*]

'Since you came into my house, I've no position here! I am lower than any slave! Dust and ashes! No longer the Lady Ellen . . . but Cinderella . . .!'

MARGARET. Don't laugh at her, Melissa.

[MELISSA *instantly repents, runs to her side, and she puts an arm round her daughter.*]

Think how you'd feel if I died.

MELISSA. Mother!

MARGARET. You recoil from the very thought. Try to imagine it has happened. You are all alone . . . not even your sister to comfort you . . . and your only consolation is that you are mistress of your father's house.

MELISSA. She ruled it so badly.

MARGARET. But she did it. And it eased her sorrow a little. Then we came.

MELISSA. I'm hard-hearted, and wicked, and altogether cruel!

MELANIE. You're altogether nothing of the sort.

MELISSA. I shouldn't let her make me cross. I'll try harder.

MARGARET. Does her father know she's gone out?

MELANIE. Oh, no. We didn't want to worry him.

MARGARET. Dear James. Nothing would disturb him greatly while he's composing a speech.

MELISSA. Again?

MELANIE. What about?

MARGARET. Goodness knows . . . I doubt if *he* does!

[*There is a knock on the door, centre.*]

She's back. But why knock?

MELISSA. To annoy us.

[*She runs to the door, flings it open, and calls:*]

Come in, darling!

[*The* FAIRY *appears on the threshold. She wears a patched and multi-coloured cloak, and is carrying a tray of laces and ribbons. A hood covers her crown. She is, apparently, disguised as a pedlar.* MELISSA *gives a startled squeak.*]

Oh! I beg your pardon!

MARGARET. Do come in. It's so cold.

FAIRY. Yes, you mustn't get a chill.

[*She steps haughtily into the room.*]

MARGARET. I was thinking of you.

FAIRY. Oh . . . were you?

[MELISSA *takes another look outside, and closes the door.*]

MARGARET [*to* MELISSA]. No sign of her?

MELISSA. She may be hiding in the stables, hoping we'll think she's gone to the woods for wood.

FAIRY. To the where, for what?

MARGARET. A family problem. Come to the fire, good

woman, and warm yourself. You're out late. It must be such a wearing business, going from door to door. Are you hungry?

FAIRY. Er . . .

MARGARET. You're welcome to stay here for the night.

FAIRY. Are you the cruel stepmother of Cinderella? And the ugly sisters?

[*There is a little pause.*]

MARGARET. I am the Baron's second wife.

MELANIE. And Cinderella tells us we are ugly.

[*Another pause.*]

FAIRY. Will you excuse me while I go away and think this out?

[*She goes quickly out centre, closing the door behind her.* MELISSA *stamps her foot in a flurry of indignation.*]

MELISSA. You see how she lies about us to the tradesmen and pedlars! Cruel and ugly! Oh, the little beast!

MELANIE. It doesn't matter.

MELISSA. It's not fair! We may not be as pretty as she, but need she say we're hideous!

MARGARET. People can see for themselves.

MELISSA. The tale will go round among those who've never laid eyes on us, and never will.

MARGARET. Then their opinion can be of no interest.

[MELISSA *casts herself into her mother's arms.*]

MELISSA. To call you cruel . . .!

[*There is another knock on the centre door.* MELANIE *goes to open it.*]

MELANIE. Cinders . . . is that you, dear?

[*The* DEMON *strides in, and strikes an imposing attitude. He also is loosely disguised as a pedlar,*

and carries a basket of ribbons and trinkets. He goes determinedly into rhymed couplets.]

DEMON. It is I, lady!

MARGARET. You're a pedlar, too.

DEMON. Ha, ha! I am. Here are my wares to view.
Mirrors for malice . . . garnishes for greed . . .
Ribbons for ruthlessness! Here's stuff indeed
Fitting for you. And I have more as well . . .
Poison, and deadly charm, and wicked spell!
[*He throws a yellow ribbon into* MELISSA'S *hands.*]
Yellow for jealousy! Scarlet for disdain!
[*He tosses a scarlet ribbon round* MELANIE'S *neck, and advances on* DAME MARGARET. *The ladies are all slightly stunned.*]
Hair-dye and rouge for those whose beauties wane.

MARGARET. Are you all right?

DEMON [*off balance*]. What?

MARGARET. You needn't go through your patter for us.

MELISSA. And what a way to talk to my mother!

MARGARET. Hush, dear. He didn't mean it personally. [*Kindly, to the* DEMON.] I take you to be some sort of mountebank, rehearsing a part. You're very clever, to learn all that nonsense, and here's a coin for you.

DEMON. I don't . . . quite understand . . .

MARGARET. If you're hungry, you may have some bread and cheese. Poor fellow, you look quite pale.
[*The girls put the ribbons back into his basket.*]

DEMON. No . . . I say . . . look here . . .!

MELANIE. Fold the ribbon neatly, Melissa. These are his props.

DEMON [*to* MARGARET]. Aren't you Cinderella's stepmother?

MARGARET. I am Dame Margaret of Castelgaunt. Lady Ellen is my stepdaughter.

DEMON. Lady Ellen?

MELISSA. Cinderella is just a sort of pet-name that she invented.

MELANIE. Please don't believe any gossip you may have heard about us all.

DEMON. The story runs that you are cruel and jealous . . .

MELISSA. You've been talking to her!

MELANIE. Have you seen her tonight? We're so worried. It's late and cold, and she shouldn't be out at such a time.

MELISSA. In a very few minutes I'm going to look for her.

MARGARET. Whatever she may say about us . . . she is our baby.

DEMON. Crumbs!

[*There is a flash, and a bang, and he vanishes.*]

MARGARET [*weakly*]. What a clever trick!

[*The door, down left, opens, and the* BARON *ambles in. He is tall, and thin, with a vague and kindly face. He wears glasses, and a scholarly stoop. His hair is silvery and plentiful. He has much dignity and sweetness. In his hand is clasped a large dictionary.*]

Oh, here's James.

[*She goes to her husband, and pats him reassuringly.*]

BARON. I came to find . . . a noise . . . I thought I heard . . .

MARGARET. The door slammed.

BARON. Oh. Where's Ella?

MELISSA. She just slipped out for a walk.

MELANIE. She'll be back soon, sir.

BARON. Late for walking. Slipped, eh? All this frost. Why did she slam the door? Have you seen my book on roses, dear?

MARGARET. I'll come and look for it.

BARON. Could be anywhere.

MARGARET. Probably on your desk.

BARON. You said she'd gone out. I want a quotation for my speech. Where shall we start looking?

MELISSA. Perhaps the stable . . .?

BARON. It *was* under my pillow. Did she take her cloak? Chilly. For the King's birthday.

MARGARET [*baffled by this last*]. What, dear?

BARON. You know . . . anniversary . . . day he was born. My speech is to say the young Prince is like a rose-bud on the old trunk. Must word it differently. That door will be off its hinges if she slams it so.

MARGARET. Yes, won't it? Let's go and find your book, and perhaps you'd read me your speech.

BARON. Not started yet. Got bogged down in the dictionary . . . lots of extraordinary words . . . but it will go with a bang . . . yes . . . wreck the hinges!

[*He looks severely at the centre doors, and goes out with* MARGARET, *down left.*]

MELISSA. Poor lamb, how muddled he gets!

MELANIE. He doesn't really. It's just that things come up in an odd order.

[*There is a gentle tapping at the centre doors.*]

MELISSA. If that's more pedlars . . .!

[*She flings open one of the doors, and shouts:*]

What do you want?

[CINDERELLA *enters, arrogantly.*]

CINDERELLA. May I not enter my own home?

MELISSA [*weakly*]. Do.

MELANIE. Poor Melissa!

CINDERELLA. Yes, poor dear Melissa! What a pity she was fooled into opening the door! If she'd known it was me, she could have put up the bars!

[*She drops a few small twigs on the fire, haughtily.*]

Having brought firewood, may I now be permitted to warm myself?

[BARNY *comes in, centre, and closes the door behind him. He is a sturdy, pleasant young man, with curly brown hair, broad shoulders, and a strong and kindly face. He wears simple clothes, and has a general look of honesty and integrity. His appearance does not belie him. He usually maintains an impassive front, but tends to lose the thread of anything he's saying or doing if* CINDERELLA *looks at him directly.*]

Shut the door, Barny. I'm frozen.

BARNY. It's shut, my lady.

CINDERELLA. My lady! My lady! How can you name me so? Bare-footed, ragged, uncared-for . . . forsaken, and flung among the ashes! . . . do I look like anybody's lady?

BARNY. You don't look much, but you are my lady.

CINDERELLA. How dare you say I look awful?

MELANIE. Ella, dear, where have you been?

CINDERELLA. *Cinder*ella!

MELANIE. All right, Cinderella, then. Where have you . . .?

CINDERELLA. Where I please! When no one cares,

what does it matter where I go? To the forest for firewood.

BARNY. There's plenty in the barn.

CINDERELLA. Hold your foolish tongue!

BARNY. Yes, my lady.

MELISSA. Did Barny find you?

BARNY. Yes, I . . .

CINDERELLA. Yes, he did, stupid thing! I wasn't lost. He came questing up, like a big, brown, faithful dog . . . looking for the footsteps of his lady . . .

BARNY. Footprints.

CINDERELLA. } What?
BARNY. } You can't see footsteps.

CINDERELLA. Leave the room!

MELANIE. Cinderella, dear . . .

CINDERELLA. Away, fellow, before I box your ears! You're impertinent and ridiculous! And hideous! Just because you've known me since I was a child . . .

BARNY. Not so long since.

CINDERELLA. *Years* since! How dare you speak so? I'll tell Father. You're only a page!

BARNY. Squire, madam. I'm the Baron's squire, now.

CINDERELLA. To me you will never be anything but a nasty, scruffy little page-boy!

BARNY [*sadly*]. I know that.

MELANIE. Darling, you're being very unkind . . .

CINDERELLA. Unkind? *I*? And you, I suppose, are the soul of sweetness and nobility?

MELISSA. Melanie *is* sweet!

CINDERELLA. Ha! And you? You, who grudge me a little warmth for my bare feet . . .

MELISSA. I've offered to get your shoes . . . often!

CINDERELLA. Frozen . . . here at my own fireside! I beg your pardon . . . *your* fireside!

MELISSA. What rubbish! All the castle is yours.

CINDERELLA. Don't mock me. I have nothing . . . I *am* nothing! Less than nobody at all. Here is my only resting-place . . . among the cinders . . .!

[*She sinks down on the hearth, gracefully tragic.*]

MELANIE. Darling, you'll get filthy.

CINDERELLA. Do you grudge me even this?

MELISSA [*firmly*]. Stop it, Cinders, do!

[MELANIE *stoops and picks up the cat from* CINDERELLA'S *skirts.*]

MELANIE. You're sitting on the cat.

[CINDERELLA *springs up and seizes the animal from her stepsister.*]

CINDERELLA. It's my cat! Leave him alone. You're not to hurt him.

MELANIE. Why would I hurt him?

CINDERELLA. It would be just like you. Because he is mine. My own mother gave him to me for my birthday . . . the best present . . . dear puss . . .

[*She gives a small sob into the cat's fur.*]

MELISSA. If you think Melanie would be unkind to any animal . . . even yours . . . then you're further out of your mind than I thought.

MELANIE. Melissa!

[CINDERELLA *puts the cat on a chair, up left, and turns on her relatives.*]

CINDERELLA. So! I'm mad, now, am I? That's the latest insult. And a useful tale to spread abroad. Our poor stepsister is raving mad. So you mustn't believe her if she says she is starved and beaten and flung out into the snow . . .!

MELISSA. Now listen to me!

MELANIE. Careful, Melissa.

[MELISSA *catches* CINDERELLA *by the wrist, and speaks forcefully and seriously.*]

MELISSA. Why do you hurt yourself so? You're inventing nightmares. You know it isn't true. Please don't hate us. We want you to be happy . . .

CINDERELLA. Then leave this castle! Go back where you came from. You and your mother. Leave us alone. We don't want you here. You've stolen my home from me . . . and my father! Give them back . . . you witches! You demons!

MELANIE. It's no use. She won't ever listen to reason.

CINDERELLA. Ugly, ugly, ugly things! And jealous . . . you've always been jealous! I know how you detest me!

MELANIE. We pity you.

CINDERELLA. Oh, your cruel, sneering voice, and scornful eyes!

MELISSA [*almost in tears*]. Sometimes I think it's I who will go mad!

[MELANIE *puts an arm round her sister.*]

MELANIE. Never mind. You did your best.

[*They go off, sadly, down left.* BARNY *opens the door for them, and then he turns when they have gone, and looks at* CINDERELLA.]

BARNY. You shouldn't say such things to them. They're kind.

CINDERELLA. Then go and cheer them up!

BARNY. I will.

[*He goes off, down left.* CINDERELLA *makes a quick move as though she would call him back.*

Then she bites her lip, goes to scoop up the cat from the chair and sits down on the hearth-rug.]

CINDERELLA. They're all against me. Except you, my little cat. You like me, don't you? You understand.

[*She stares into the fire. From a hidden entrance, up right, steps the* FAIRY. *She has dispensed with her pedlar disguise. The* DEMON *wanders in from somewhere up left. He is, once more, demoniac. Both look morose.*]

FAIRY. I enjoyed that scene.

DEMON. Most edifying.

FAIRY. Are you invisible, too?

DEMON. She'd have a fit if I wasn't.

FAIRY. Do her good!

DEMON. You may be right, at that. Show her your power.

FAIRY. You mean appear like this? Now, at this hour?

DEMON. Why not? Don't stand there, staring like a fish!

Appear before her . . . offer her a wish.
And it will turn her from her woes, I ween.

FAIRY [*thoughtfully*]. I'd like to turn her into something green.

DEMON. No, no! Collect yourself, and toe the line;
Make one false move and victory is mine.

FAIRY. Never!

DEMON. That's better.

FAIRY. I defy you, ghoul!

[*She droops again.*]

If this goes wrong I'm going to look a fool!

DEMON. Whatever happens, do your best for her.

FAIRY [*irritably*]. Who's her good fairy?

DEMON. You are.

FAIRY. Thank you, sir!

[*The* DEMON *grins, and goes off, up left. The* FAIRY *smooths her hair and her skirt. Then she takes a deep breath, and slowly waves her wand above her head. She speaks impressively:*]

Hear me, all magic powers of good and right,
Now let me be revealed to human sight.

[*As she strikes a particularly impressive attitude,* CINDERELLA *breaks down completely. She puts her cat on the chair, and gives a heart-broken cry.*]

CINDERELLA. Oh, Mother . . . Mother . . . Mother . . .!

[*The* FAIRY'S *face changes.*]

FAIRY. Help is near.

[CINDERELLA *lifts her head and stares with tear-blurred eyes. She gasps.*]

CINDERELLA. What do you want?

FAIRY. Your happiness, my dear.

CINDERELLA. What are you dressed as?

FAIRY. What do you mean, what am I dressed as?

[*She forgets her rhymes, and her sympathy, and speaks shortly.*]

CINDERELLA. Who are you?

FAIRY. Your good fairy.

CINDERELLA. I haven't got one.

FAIRY [*grittily*]. You must have, if I'm it!

CINDERELLA. And I'm not sure that I believe in fairies.

FAIRY. That, under the circumstances, is one of the sillier remarks.

CINDERELLA. You might just be a frightful dream.

[*The* FAIRY *restrains herself with some violence.*]

FAIRY. We are getting off the track. Shall we go back a little? I am your good fairy—and don't argue!—here to help and advise you.

CINDERELLA. No one can help me . . . only myself.

FAIRY. That's probably quite true . . . though not the way you mean it.

CINDERELLA. And I don't want your advice.

FAIRY [*goaded*]. What you want . . .! [*She steadies herself.*] You really must stop being so obstructive, dear!

CINDERELLA. What do you expect from me? Gratitude for everyone's pity? What would you do, you being me?

FAIRY. I don't know what to do, me being *me*! I've never felt so completely helpless.

[*The centre door opens, and the* DEMON *enters. He is again in his pedlar disguise.*]

Oh!

DEMON. Good evening, ladies. Can I be of any assistance?

FAIRY. Well, can you?

DEMON [*to* CINDERELLA]. What are you scowling for?

CINDERELLA. Don't talk to me like that! Do you know who I am?

DEMON. You look like a particularly scruffy gipsy.

CINDERELLA [*proudly*]. I am the Lady Ellen.

FAIRY [*to* DEMON]. Oh, you clever!

CINDERELLA. No, no! I mean, I *was* the Lady Ellen! You're right . . . I'm nothing now.

FAIRY. She's gone again.

CINDERELLA. Poorer than the lowest serving-wench. Barefoot . . . in rags and ashes . . . I say, do you notice anything odd about that lady?

DEMON. What sort of odd?

CINDERELLA. Her dress . . . that crown. She said she was a fairy.

DEMON. Then she probably is.

CINDERELLA. And you don't find that peculiar?

DEMON. When you're my age . . .

CINDERELLA. She said she was my good fairy.

DEMON. You lucky girl!

[CINDERELLA *crosses to the* FAIRY, *and touches her wand with a gently inquisitive gesture.*]

CINDERELLA. Could there really be magic for me?

DEMON. Try it and see.

[CINDERELLA *curtsies to the* FAIRY, *rather sweetly, and says in a tearful little voice that is quite sincere:*]

CINDERELLA. Will you please overlook the things I've said to you? You found me in a bad temper. And I was horrid to you the last time we met . . . in the forest . . .

FAIRY. In a bad temper.

CINDERELLA. I'm almost never nice these days. You'd better just go away and leave me to my fate. Don't try to help me . . . I'm really not worth the bother . . .

DEMON. I'll let you two ladies sort it out between you.

[*He goes to the doors, centre, speaking aside to the* FAIRY *as he passes her.*]

That's got it back to normal!

FAIRY. I'm glad you think so. If it takes a demon to make her normal . . .!

DEMON. Sh!

[*He goes out, and closes the door behind him.*]

CINDERELLA. Was he a demon?

FAIRY [*shocked*]. You shouldn't have heard that!

CINDERELLA. What a darling! I didn't know demons were handsome.

FAIRY. You don't know anything! Really! You can't fly in the face of all tradition. Do try to observe a few basic conventions. And don't get sentimental ideas about the lower orders of black magic.

CINDERELLA. You're awfully hide-bound.

FAIRY. I'm *what*?

CINDERELLA. Don't let's have a row. If you're getting cross with me again we'd better not argue. What about my wish?

FAIRY. Your . . .?

CINDERELLA. That's what you've come for, isn't it? When a good fairy calls on a poor and humble maiden, she always offers her the great wish of her heart.

FAIRY. The operative word being humble.

CINDERELLA. Dear fairy . . . don't be angry! Wave your wand, and make me happy and good.

FAIRY. I'm not sure . . .

CINDERELLA [*honestly*]. I know I deserve nothing. I know I'm horrid. But everyone seems to think I'll grow out of it. They keep saying, 'Give her time.' And yet . . . I miss my mother so. And time doesn't make it easier to bear. I can't stop myself being angry and spiteful. I could bite my tongue off when I hear some of the things I say! I'd so like to be nice . . . I'd like people to love me again . . . can you make it happen?

FAIRY [*moved*]. Not by waving a wand, little Cinderella. What you are, you are. What you will become is up to you. I can only change circumstances if you wish.

CINDERELLA. I do wish.

FAIRY. Then state your application clearly. I am ready.

[*She raises her wand.* CINDERELLA *looks at her with excited wonder.*]

CINDERELLA. Oh, I must be careful! I must choose my words! There's a ripple of enchantment in the air. My future lies on my lips. Let me make no mistake in what I say . . .

[*She covers her eyes with her hands.*]

I wish . . . I wish . . . I wish . . . that I may find myself in a place where I can be happy . . .

[*The* FAIRY *slowly moves her wand. A white light glimmers briefly over the scene, and a distant note of music sounds and fades.* CINDERELLA *uncovers her eyes, and looks round expectantly. Her expression alters.*]

It didn't work!

FAIRY. Indeed it did. The light came.

CINDERELLA. But I'm still here.

FAIRY. So it would seem.

CINDERELLA. Then magic is all a lie! And legends false! I wished to be elsewhere!

FAIRY. Did you?

CINDERELLA [*furiously*]. How could you trick me so! I thought I had found someone to trust. And all the time you were just laughing at me! Is no humiliation to be spared me? No! I must have nothing . . . I must *be* nothing! No longer my mother's daughter . . . no longer the mistress of my father's house . . . not the Lady Ellen . . . but Cinderella, in rags and ashes and tears . . .!

FAIRY [*coldly*]. You are working yourself up.

CINDERELLA. I hate you!

[*The door, down left, opens, and the* BARON *wanders in. He blinks at the* FAIRY *through his spectacles, though showing no surprise at what he sees. He crosses to the table up left.*]

BARON. Didn't know you had a friend here, Ella. Left my book . . .

[*He picks up a large book from the table.*]

Here. Greek poetry. Have you read . . .? No, you don't, do you? Introduce me.

CINDERELLA [*sulkily*]. My good fairy . . . my father, the Baron.

BARON. How do you do, my dear? Pretty. Needed a line from old Anaxandrides . . . 'Love is a great teacher of the truths of life . . .' words to that effect. Didn't mean to interrupt. Do go on shouting. Charming head-dress.

[*He goes out, down left. The* FAIRY *looks dazed.*]

CINDERELLA [*defensively*]. He's not mad.

FAIRY. Who said he was?

CINDERELLA. He used to be the Lord Chancellor . . . but he was asked to resign. He's writing lots of speeches for when he's asked to un-resign. He was a very good Lord Chancellor.

FAIRY. I'm sure.

CINDERELLA [*wearily*]. Now you'd better go, hadn't you? We have obviously very little in common. I shall only get cross again, and make you hate me more than ever.

FAIRY. I don't hate you. At least . . .

CINDERELLA. Everyone does. I'm quite used to it.

FAIRY. Has it ever struck you that you could be wrong about anything?

CINDERELLA. I'm always in the wrong! Everyone takes care to put me in the wrong. How could I ever be right? I'm only Cinderella . . .

FAIRY. Yes, I know. In rags and ashes!

CINDERELLA. Please . . . if there was one word of truth in what you said about wanting to help me . . . please go away, and leave me alone! It's all you can do for me. You might grant me this small wish, even if you couldn't manage a magic one.

FAIRY. Very well. But let me tell you this . . . magic wishes obey the secret thoughts of those who make them. You asked to be where you could be happy . . . and in your heart you knew the answer. You got your wish. Good-bye.

[*She turns to go, as* BARNY *enters, down left. He stops when he sees the* FAIRY, *and she looks annoyed.*]

You haven't seen me.

BARNY Very well, ma'am. If you say so.

[*The* FAIRY *waves her wand violently.*]

FAIRY. Let me from human vision disappear;
Oh, magic, magic . . . get me out of here!

[*There is a flash of white light, and the* FAIRY *is gone.* BARNY *shakes his head admiringly, and turns to* CINDERELLA.]

BARNY. Now what have you been doing, my lady?

CINDERELLA. Don't blame me. I didn't ask her here. She . . . she just walked in . . . or something. Said she could do magic.

BARNY. There! And didn't that please you?

CINDERELLA. It maddened me! Nothing but trickery! Walking in out of nowhere, and saying she was . . . anyone could talk like that! *I* could say I was a fairy, and wave a bit of stick . . .!

BARNY. I'd like to see you vanish in a flash.

CINDERELLA. Would you, indeed, you hateful thing! You want to get rid of me, too. You've fallen in love with those witches, my stepsisters!

BARNY. Both of them?

CINDERELLA. Both of them. They've put spells on you!

BARNY. My lady . . .

CINDERELLA. Cinderella! Don't mock me with courtesy. Have you forgotten how you loved me when we were children?

BARNY. Forgotten?

CINDERELLA. You said I was your princess . . . your queen . . .

BARNY. And so you are.

CINDERELLA. Now you've turned against me, with the rest. Ordered me from my last place of refuge! Even the ashes on the hearth are too good for me! I must vanish utterly!

BARNY. I never said . . .

CINDERELLA. Oh, yes you did! And in a flash, too! Barny . . .

[*She bursts into tears, and casts herself back on the hearth-rug.* BARNY *looks helpless.* MELANIE *comes in down left, carrying a mug of hot milk.* MELISSA *follows.*]

MELANIE. Cinderella, you really must stop shouting and banging! It's very late, and you ought to be in bed. Now, here's some nice hot milk to take up with you . . .

[CINDERELLA *gives a loud wail.*]

MELISSA. What's the matter with her, this time?

BARNY. She's mad at me, my lady Melissa.

[CINDERELLA *turns an outraged face on him.*]

CINDERELLA. Barny! You dare to call me mad! To side with these evil hags!

[*She springs to her feet, and advances on them.*]

You'd like to see me ranting and gibbering! You want to drive me quite crazy! I'll oblige you!

MELANIE. No, please don't!

[CINDERELLA *gives a wavering scream, and drags her hair over her eyes. The others recoil.*]

CINDERELLA. How's that? I can do better.

BARNY. Yes, well we don't want to see it. You'll have the Baron and Dame Margaret down.

CINDERELLA. Let's have everybody. Then they can see what you've done. The whole world can know!

[*She screams again. The* FAIRY *enters, from up right, and she is extremely put out. The* DEMON *comes in from up left, frowning thoughtfully. They are invisible to the others.* CINDERELLA *makes faces at her unhappy family, crooking her fingers nastily.*]

And if I'm mad, no one can blame me for my actions. I can tear people's eyes out! Pull the hair from their horrid heads . . . yes, by the roots!

MELISSA. Stop it!

[*There is a knock at the doors, centre.*]

MELANIE. Pedlars!

CINDERELLA. Neighbours! Now show them your mad little sister!

[*She gives another scream. The doors are opened from outside, and the* PRINCE *is standing there, with* DANNY.]

PRINCE. Oh . . . excuse me . . .

CINDERELLA. Come in, do, and see the show!

MELISSA. No, go away!

MELANIE. We're . . . frightfully busy, at the moment.

[*The* PRINCE *and* DANNY *come farther into the room, looking interestedly at the distraught* MELANIE *and* MELISSA.]

PRINCE. Is something wrong?

CINDERELLA. Yes . . . me! I'm the mad Cinderella.

FAIRY [*horrified*]. Oh, no!

CINDERELLA. Jeer to your hearts' content. You're my enemies . . . every single one of you! I hate and despise you all!

PRINCE [*mildly*]. We only came to ask the way. We saw a light . . .

CINDERELLA. If you knew how silly you look in that tiara!

FAIRY. Don't!

[CINDERELLA *points at the* PRINCE *and laughs wildly, then, looking round at the others, she gives an hysterical little giggle at their stunned expressions. She bursts into tears, and runs out of the room, down left. There is a slight pause.*]

PRINCE. What did she say her name was?

FAIRY. All is lost!

[*The* DEMON *springs forward, and lifts his arms commandingly. He cries in ringing tones, which are inaudible to the humans, naturally:*]

DEMON. Power of black magic, stand me in good stead!

[*Pointing at the* PRINCE *and* DANNY.]

You two get lost! And all the rest to bed!

[*Darkness falls suddenly and completely. When the lights come back, the immortals are alone together in the room.*]

Good?

FAIRY. Magnificent.

[*She takes off her crown exhaustedly, and rubs her head.*]

I've such a headache. I feel ill with nerves. How can we ever get things straight, now?

[*She kneels on the hearth to warm her hands.*]

See how I'm shivering!

DEMON. Well, don't go on like that. Look at you—all mucky.

[*He raises her to her feet again, and brushes ashes from her skirt.*]

FAIRY [*drearily*]. All over the floor!

[*She takes a besom broom from a corner of the fireplace, and starts sweeping the ash back into the fire. She says in a mournful little voice:*]

I give it up. I now throw in my hand.
Nothing will ever go the way I planned.
The girl will not accept my help, and so
There's nothing left . . . but shed a tear and go.
The first time ever that I've lost the thread . . .
I'm so ashamed I can't hold up my head:
And, worst of all the heartache and mischance,
I shall not see the small glass slippers dance.

DEMON. Oh, yes, you will! The tale is not yet told;
The magic midnight you shall still behold!
All must go as you wish.

FAIRY. I can't see how.

DEMON. You've never known me really cross till now!
I'll make the story go the way you choose . . .

FAIRY. I'd like to see her in those little shoes.

[*The* DEMON *comes to her with the mug of hot milk*

left behind by MELANIE. *The* FAIRY *has seated herself on the fireside stool, and still holds the besom broom. She looks angelically pretty and sad . . . not unlike the traditional picture of Cinderella herself.*]

DEMON. And so you shall . . . drink this! . . . when all is done.
You think I'd let that monkey spoil your fun?
She shall go to the Ball . . . by magic . . .

FAIRY [*anxiously*]. White?

DEMON. Of course.

FAIRY. I'm sure I'll never get it right.

DEMON. I'll help you with it. Or I'll do it!

FAIRY. You?

DEMON. Yes! If I have to split myself in two!

CURTAIN

ACT II SCENE I

IN ANOTHER FOREST, MIDNIGHT

This is a very sinister place indeed. A forest, certainly, but not the sort anyone would choose for a picnic. Not if they had any sense. Trailing creepers, in varied shades of purple, and briers with great spikes, are tangled all over the tree-branches. Toadstools, deadlier even than usual in appearance, sprout nastily amongst the unwholesome undergrowth. There is a cold, metallic light over everything, which flickers occasionally, and changes its colour rather unpleasantly, and never for the better. The PRINCE *is taking it all fairly calmly. He sits at the foot of a tree, whittling carelessly at a small piece of wood.* DANNY, *on the other hand, is annoyed. He is busy hacking at some creepers with his sword, and arguing:*

DANNY. I don't care what you say! I'll hack us out of here, if it takes all night!

PRINCE. It will take a good deal longer than that. You're just wasting your time. It grows faster than you can cut it.

DANNY. That's impossible.

PRINCE. Of course. But perfectly true.

DANNY [*pausing to wipe his brow*]. You know what I think?

PRINCE. Yes, Danny.

DANNY. Well, what?

PRINCE. You think it's a dream.

DANNY. Nightmare.

PRINCE. And you're wrong.

DANNY. What else can it be? One moment we were standing in that castle, talking to . . . [*His voice changes.*] I say, did you notice what an enchanting girl . . .?

PRINCE. Indeed I did. I wonder who she was?

DANNY. So do I.

PRINCE. If we did know, I'd thank you to keep out of it.

DANNY. You're taking a mean advantage of your position.

PRINCE. Nonsense. She would never be impressed by a crown.

DANNY. I suppose she wouldn't.

[*There is a slight pause. Both young men look rather thoughtful. Then* DANNY *returns to earth.*]

What were we talking about?

PRINCE. Dreams . . . and nightmares.

DANNY. Yes. There was a swirl, and a swoop, and a sort of ear-splitting rattle, and here we were! In a dreary great forest, full of spikes and prickles. Lost! And a hundred thousand miles from anywhere!

PRINCE. Being lost, where is anywhere?

DANNY. Hey? Oh, I see what you mean. But let me tell you, it might easily turn out to be a hundred thousand miles! Or one, for that matter. And there you sit!

PRINCE. What would you like me to do, Danny?

DANNY. You might try giving me a hand.

PRINCE. Waste of energy.

DANNY. So you keep saying. If you're right . . . if these grow faster than they're cut . . . then this *must* be a dream. It's got to be!

PRINCE. Why do you think dreams are more peculiar than reality?

DANNY. Aren't they?

PRINCE. No.

[DANNY *cuts carefully through the top of a brier, and then watches it closely as it slowly grows longer than it was before. He shudders, and turns to the* PRINCE, *who is smiling at his expression.*]

Such weird things can happen in life that I've a dim idea it may *all* turn out to be a dream of sorts. And, when we ultimately wake up, we'll wonder why we took any of it seriously.

DANNY [*with affection*]. Oh, you! You're always half asleep.

PRINCE. Perhaps sometimes I'm half awake from the sleep of life. While you rush off in seven different directions, towards nowhere. While you struggle against a dream within a dream within a dream.

DANNY [*anxiously*]. Are you feeling all right?

PRINCE. About average.

DANNY. You think too much. I know what's a dream and what isn't.

PRINCE. Do you, Dan?

DANNY. Well, take a nightmare, for instance. You're walking along a peaceful road, talking to your auntie . . .

PRINCE. I haven't an auntie.

DANNY. I have. This is *my* nightmare! You're chatting cosily, and she turns into a huge beetle, and the road becomes a sea of mud. I get half drowned in it, all thick and sticky. Then I manage to grow some pretty little pink wings, and I fly away in the clouds. And the wings turn inside-out, and down I come . . . splosh!

PRINCE. And you think that can't happen in real life?

DANNY. Well, no.

PRINCE. How lucky you are! I can't answer for your auntie, but I'm always meeting people who turn into something rather unexpected. And the quiet road becomes choking mud. One forces one's mind to take flight . . . to escape . . . and, as you say, the wings fail at last, and . . . splosh!

DANNY. I don't see things quite the way you do.

PRINCE. Perhaps it's just as well, Danny. You are spared the horrors . . . as well as the wonders . . . through the brick wall.

DANNY. Are you applying all that to our present situation?

PRINCE. Yes. You're using force against the unknown.

[DANNY *stands over the* PRINCE, *challengingly.*]

DANNY. Then how would you tackle it?

PRINCE. I've been thinking it over. Have you considered the possibility of magic?

DANNY. Ridiculous!

PRINCE. You dismiss magic so lightly?

DANNY. How could it happen in this day and age?

PRINCE. We met a lady this evening, walking in the woods, whom you instantly recognized as magical.

DANNY. Oh, that's different! Little spells, and minor witchery. Cross my hand with silver, and there's a lucky charm. This would be quite another kettle of fish! It would be real sorcery. Awful! Anything might happen.

[*The light round them turns much greener.*]

Are you sure you feel all right? You look frightful!

PRINCE. Just slightly nervous. And you don't look so healthy yourself.

DANNY. The light's changed. This place looks worse than ever.

PRINCE. Far more magic.

DANNY. Far more nightmarish!

[*An arm reaches through a tangled bush, and touches his shoulder. He leaps back with a cry.*]

PRINCE. Danny, don't!

DANNY. There's something nasty under that bush!

[*A furious voice shouts from the direction he indicates.*]

VOICE [*from bush*]. Get me out!

DANNY [*to* PRINCE]. Did you hear that?

PRINCE. I'm not deaf. Let's have a look.

DANNY. No, sir! Not you. It may be dangerous.

[*He springs in front of the* PRINCE.]

PRINCE. Danny, do stop being heroic.

DANNY. Just stand back till I've made sure.

[*He looks cautiously over the top of the bush, and starts back again rapidly.*]

It's ghastly! All white and tattered . . . with mad eyes!

PRINCE. May I look?

[*He puts* DANNY *aside, and looks over the bush. Then he gives his hand to the* FAIRY *and assists her to step out into the clearing. She glares at* DANNY. *But he is not too much to blame for his remarks. She does look odd. Her dress is torn, and her hair is tangled and loose. She has lost her crown, though she still clings fiercely to her wand, which is slightly bent.*]

FAIRY. And what's so particularly ghastly about me?

DANNY [*feebly*]. I thought you were a monster.

FAIRY. You're dreaming.

DANNY [*to* PRINCE]. There you are!

FAIRY. What a time I've had finding you!

DANNY. How did you know we were lost?

FAIRY. Look here, young man . . . I'm not going to answer any questions. This is not the time or the place. Just take it from me that I'm doing my best for you, and let it go at that.

PRINCE. Surely we may know your name at least?

FAIRY. That is a secret which no one must ever learn. When I tell my name, I give away my rank, my power, and my heart. Just call me 'ma'am.'

PRINCE. Very well. We'll pretend you are a beautiful and kindly fairy, come to our rescue in an enchanted forest.

FAIRY. You do that.

PRINCE. But, ma'am, forgive me . . . you seem rather in need of some assistance yourself. You look tired, and ruffled. Is there anything we can do to help?

DANNY. Like firewood?

PRINCE [*to him*]. One more word, and you're under arrest!

FAIRY. Quite right.

[*She casts a repressive glance at* DANNY, *and turns her sweetest look on the* PRINCE.]

I am a bit distraught. I could tell you the reasons . . . though I won't, for I fear you might understand them.

PRINCE. You fear?

FAIRY. Sir, you have the makings of a poet in your spirit. And, if that were your true destiny, I would tell you the facts of mine. But you have another role to play on this occasion, and it's best for you to turn back from the hidden pathways of the unknown. The open roads of the world are safest for those who must live with the world. You guess too much at magic already. Let me handle that side of things. [*She adds glumly.*] If I can.

PRINCE. I don't doubt your powers . . .

FAIRY. I do! This ensorcelled forest in which you're now trapped is outside my territory. And I've no idea how to get you back. I've never handled ordinary transport. Even I had to walk here.

DANNY. What brought us?

FAIRY. You may well ask! But don't dare!

[*She scowls at him.*]

Let me tell you something, Captain-the-Earl-of-whatever-it-is! If you meet, by chance, a mysterious lady in a haunted forest . . . who tells you not to ask silly questions, it's lunacy to go on asking them. What's more, it's very reckless!

DANNY [*indignantly*]. I've hardly said a word! You are mean!

FAIRY. Now look here . . .!

PRINCE. Forgive him, ma'am. He's worried. He's

supposed to be my official guard, as well as my friend . . .

FAIRY. You must have your work cut out guarding him.

PRINCE. Well . . .

DANNY. I'm responsible to the King for your safe return, whatever you may think of my capabilities! I may not have the brain, or any imagination, or . . . or . . .

PRINCE. Danny, I didn't mean . . .

DANNY. But I know my duty, sir. And that is to get you home.

FAIRY [*repentantly*]. Oh, we've upset him.

DANNY. You think I understand nothing but things I can see and touch. Well, I understand this much! You, ma'am, are a white witch, or fairy. This is a magic wood. We're caught up in some powerful cantrip. And I intend to fight it to the limit of my strength, whatever it may involve, to see that my Prince is safe. Poet or no, brick walls or none, I'll do my job as I see it.

FAIRY. Danny . . . if you both came to my land, the Prince should be my singer, and you my knight.

[*She touches his cheek gently with her hand.*]

Let us, all three, consider the situation. Tell me, are you in a hurry to get home?

PRINCE. We are, rather. You see . . . my father is the king of this country—that is, if we're still in the same country!

FAIRY. Put it like this . . . your father is king of *a* country.

DANNY. Then where are . . .?

FAIRY [*warningly*]. Danny!

[*He shrugs, and subsides.*]

PRINCE. My father has ordered a huge reception to

be held at the Palace. The biggest ever! And there'll be a row to match if I'm not there.

DANNY. His Majesty is not noted for patience.

FAIRY. He can't blame you for getting lost.

PRINCE. We shouldn't have been hunting in the first place.

DANNY. His Majesty sent a strict order . . . in writing . . . that His Highness should stay in the Palace until after the Ball. He feared the Prince would slip away.

PRINCE. For I've been commanded to choose a wife from among the ladies present at the Ball. It will last from evening until morning, and by then I must be betrothed . . . or else!

FAIRY. So harsh an order! Yet in spite of all, you went hunting. Against the written command of the King!

PRINCE. Danny forgot to pass it on.

FAIRY. I see. Don't you want to choose a bride?

PRINCE. Not particularly. I've never met any lady who could command my love . . . until tonight.

FAIRY [*eagerly*]. And who did you meet tonight?

PRINCE. You know . . . it occurs to me that . . . trying as my father so often is—he's sometimes right. If every noble lady in the land is coming to the Palace, I shall see her again . . .

FAIRY. See who?

PRINCE. The unknown. The loveliest. The only one that I can wed.

FAIRY. Ah . . .

PRINCE. If she comes to dance, tomorrow night . . .

FAIRY. Tomorrow! Good gracious, we haven't much time, have we?

DANNY. Now you see why I must get him back.

FAIRY [*briskly*]. I see why *I* must get him back! Have you looked everywhere for a path?

DANNY. There's no way out of this clearing.

FAIRY. You've got a sword.

DANNY. The briers grow thicker as I cut them.

FAIRY [*shaken*]. Is that where we are?

DANNY. Is what where we are?

FAIRY. My dear boy, of course you can't get through. Has the Prince tried?

DANNY. Not noticeably.

FAIRY. Thank goodness!

DANNY. He just sat there criticizing, and fiddling with a twig.

PRINCE. Carving a whistle. To summon help.

[*He shows the* FAIRY *a wooden whistle, roughly made. She gives a squeak.*]

FAIRY. Oh, no! Not that! What wood did you use?

PRINCE. Spindle wood, I think. Why?

FAIRY. Don't ever try to blow it.

PRINCE. Why not?

FAIRY. Because I say so!

PRINCE. It won't really whistle.

[*He lifts it to his lips and tries it.*]

FAIRY. Don't!

[*There is a long, low musical note. Too sweet and melodious for so unqualified an instrument. Everything goes dark. When the light returns, it is weirder than ever. And the* DEMON *is there.*]

I told you not to!

DEMON [*seeing her*]. Hallo, there!

FAIRY. Go away!

DEMON. How can I, dear?
I have been summoned by the wizard here.

PRINCE. Why, I'm no wizard.

FAIRY. It's the Prince, you fool!

DEMON. How did he come to have that magic tool?

PRINCE. If you mean this, I made it. Absolutely accidental, I promise you. I'm so sorry if it's caused any . . .

DEMON. You mean you don't want a wish?

PRINCE. Well, no, I hadn't any idea . . .

DEMON. Then I'll be off.

[*He prepares to leave, in a flurry of magic.* DANNY *springs forward and catches his arm.*]

DANNY. Wait a minute! Don't go. Of course he wants a wish.

DEMON. With my own ears I heard him say . . .

FAIRY. He wasn't thinking. Danny, how quick you were. Thank you.

DEMON. I'm not staying here.

DANNY. Yes, you are!

FAIRY. Yes, you are! That gentleman has a magic whistle, made of spindle wood. He has blown it, in an enchanted forest at midnight. He is therefore entitled to a wish from you. And a wish you will jolly well give him!

DEMON. Keep calm.

FAIRY. *I am calm!*

DEMON. And don't shout. It confuses me.

[*He turns to the* PRINCE, *and strikes an attitude.*]

Command me what you will. I shall obey.
Though your desire were half a world away
I'll get it for you. Young and noble sir,
Just let me know what fortune you prefer.
The moment I your lightest word can catch . . .

PRINCE. Show me what lies beyond this brier-patch.

FAIRY [*in horror*]. No! No! No! Stop everything! This has all gone wrong again!

DANNY [*to* PRINCE]. Do wake up! You should have wished to be home!

PRINCE. Oh, yes . . .

DEMON. The wish is made.

FAIRY. Now, Demon . . . Demon . . . please . . .!

DEMON. The rules are quite clear-cut for times like these.

Your wish is granted, Prince, for ill or good;
See what lies yonder in the sleeping wood.

[*He waves his hand, ritualistically. The* FAIRY *gives an apprehensive moan. The scene darkens. A low sound of music drifts across the air. Part of the brier-tangle becomes transparent. Slowly, in the distance, appears the misty outline of a beautiful little palace.*]

FAIRY. I forbid it! I won't have it! Demon . . . on my knees I beg you . . .! If you've ever had the slightest feeling for me . . . I'll scream the place down!

[*The palace vanishes abruptly. The metallic light returns to the scene.*]

PRINCE [*dreamily*]. What an enchanted place! Who lives there?

FAIRY [*to* DEMON]. You're not to tell!

DEMON. A princess.

PRINCE. A prisoner?

DEMON. Asleep.

PRINCE. Has she been there long?

FAIRY [*to* DEMON]. If you say one more word I'll strike you!

PRINCE. Should she be wakened?

FAIRY. Not yet! Not by you! Anyway, there's not a word of truth in it. There's no princess in that place . . . just a revolting great giant!

DANNY. Should he be destroyed?

FAIRY [*suspiciously*]. What's your name?

DANNY. The Earl of . . .

FAIRY. Your first name?

DANNY. Jack.

FAIRY. I feared so! Oh, dear Demon . . .!

DEMON. Fear not. The Prince has used a wish, 'tis true;
But spindle-whistles always carry two!
[*The* PRINCE *raises the whistle, and looks towards the invisible palace.*]

PRINCE. The sleeping . . .
[DANNY *takes the whistle from him firmly, and puts his other hand on his sword.*]

DANNY. The giant . . .
[*The* FAIRY *snatches the whistle, and gets her wish in first.*]

FAIRY. Get the Prince safely home! And Danny, too!

DEMON. Abracapocus! Wishes must come true!
[*He waves his hand. Darkness falls suddenly. There is a loud roaring noise that dies away in the distance. The light returns.* DANNY *and the* PRINCE *are gone.*]

FAIRY. You made that bit up about two wishes, didn't you? And what are you laughing at, now?

DEMON. Your disguise.

FAIRY. I'm *not* disguised! I got ripped to rags looking for those two idiots!

DEMON. Poor little darling.

FAIRY. They need watching. What did you call me?

DEMON. You know quite well.

FAIRY. I'll . . . I'll put a . . . put a spell on you!

DEMON. Go ahead. You're in such a dither you don't know a rune from a rainbow! And tell me, do you intend to wade through these thorns on your own? Or will you come with me?

FAIRY. I . . . I don't . . . I suppose I'll . . . I'll come with you, Smith.

[*She crosses to him shyly. He looks taken aback.*]

DEMON. Here, how did you know my name? It's a secret.

FAIRY. I looked it up. I hope you don't mind. But I thought . . . the way things are going . . .

DEMON. You won't tell anyone?

[*The light changes to a softer colour, and begins to fade.*]

FAIRY. As if I would!

DEMON. I'd never have allowed your Prince to go in search of the Sleeping Beauty.

[*He goes into rhyme.*]

To him that palace must remain a myth,
For it is not his story.

FAIRY [*sweetly*]. Thank you, Smith.

[*The lights fade right away into darkness.*]

CURTAIN

ACT II SCENE II

THE BARONIAL HALL, THE FOLLOWING DAY

It is early evening. Lamps are lit, and the fire is blazing cheerfully. Through the window can be seen the splendour of a red sunset.

DAME MARGARET *sits by the fire.* MELANIE *is standing by her, with her hands on the back of the chair.* MELISSA *is by the table up left. All three are dressed in the most charming ball gowns, jewelled and decorative. The laughing* CINDERELLA *is twirling round the room to show off, and to admire, the pretty white dress that makes her look demurely enchanting. Her behaviour, however, is far from demure . . . she is wild with excitement. And the others are delighted by her pleasure.*

CINDERELLA. . . . everyone clamouring to dance with me! Everyone! All the noblemen . . . princes . . . . kings! Their eyes starting from their sockets, when they see me. And they'll form a long, long queue . . .

[*She performs this fantasy with exaggerated gestures.*]

. . . 'May I have the honour?' . . . 'If you refuse,

my heart must crack in two!' . . . 'I will die for your smallest smile!' . . . but I will dance only with the handsomest and greatest of them all. The others will rush into the garden, and hang themselves!

MELANIE [*laughing*]. Oh, no!

CINDERELLA. They will. They'll all die for love of me. And I'll be dancing with the Emperor!

MELISSA. What Emperor?

CINDERELLA. Any old Emperor. He'll offer me his crown, and so I'll be an Empress. What fun! Won't I be a good one!

[*She adjusts an imaginary crown, and strikes a stately pose.*]

Everyone will admire me and respect me . . . and you'll all have to come and bow.

MELANIE. The very moment you ascend the throne.

CINDERELLA. Would you really?

MELANIE. We'd love to.

[CINDERELLA *runs to her, and takes her hand.*]

CINDERELLA. Why, I do believe you would.

MELISSA. And we'd enjoy it enormously. Look!

[*She sweeps a deep curtsy to* CINDERELLA.]

Most gracious Empress . . . this is your humble and loving sister Melissa.

[MELANIE *also goes down in a charming curtsy.*]

MELANIE. And your sister Melanie.

CINDERELLA. Oh . . .

[*She is suddenly sobered, and looks at them with anxious eyes.*]

Are you laughing at me?

[*She runs to* MARGARET, *and kneels beside her chair.*]

They're not laughing at me, are they?

MARGARET. My dear, you know they're not.

[CINDERELLA *droops her head against* MARGARET'S *skirt, and that gentle lady smooths her hair.*]

Oh, not tears. You're over-excited, love. Now, let's all calm down, and get ready to go. It's nearly time, you know. This is going to be such a lovely evening. You shall dance your slippers into fragments, and break all hearts.

CINDERELLA. Shall I really?

MARGARET. I wouldn't be at all surprised.

[*She rises, and draws* CINDERELLA *to her feet also.*]

I must go and finish dressing. You've made me laugh so much that I'm pink-eyed like a guinea-pig, and my hair is standing on end.

CINDERELLA. No. It's nice.

MARGARET. Thank you, my dear. Now could you all, for goodness' sake, try to keep tidy until the coach comes round. Where are your gloves for a start?

MELANIE. Mine are here, Mother.

MELISSA. And mine. Oh, no! I left them in my bedroom.

MARGARET. Get them, dear. And your fan.

MELISSA. Oh, my goodness!

[*She runs out of the room.* MARGARET *turns smiling back to* CINDERELLA.]

MARGARET. Ellen, you know I was your mother's friend?

[CINDERELLA *nods solemnly.*]

I promised her that you should be my daughter, too. And it made her happier . . . eased the hurt of leaving you . . .

CINDERELLA. Oh . . .

MARGARET. She will be glad to see you lay aside your grief. Not to forget her . . . oh, no, not while life lasts! But to remember without pain. She would wish to know you are dancing tonight. She left a present for you, and asked me to give it to you when you wore your first ball gown. Her necklace of pearls.

CINDERELLA. You mean . . . I'm to wear those tonight? My mother's beautiful pearls?

MARGARET. Yours.

[CINDERELLA *gives her a watery and adorable smile.*]

CINDERELLA. I don't deserve them.

MARGARET [*smiling too*]. Probably not, but I'll go and get them. They'll look perfect with that dress. Now, do sit still . . . just for a little while. Don't get excited again.

[DAME MARGARET *goes out, down left.*]

CINDERELLA. I can't sit still. I've such a funny feeling inside.

MELANIE. What have you been eating?

CINDERELLA. It's not that sort of funny.

[*She drifts round the room, smiling hazily.*]

It's like ice melting in my tummy. Warm . . . as though the sun were in my bones. And the room's all golden. There's music in my head . . .

MELANIE. Measles!

CINDERELLA. I think it's happiness.

[BARNY *comes in, down left, carrying some fur rugs.*]

Hallo, Barny. I'm happy. Does it make me look different?

BARNY. It makes you look nicer.

CINDERELLA [*dreamily*]. You are horrible.

BARNY [*to* MELANIE]. Is she all right?

MELANIE. I don't know.

CINDERELLA. I'm going to the Palace . . . to the Ball . . . to dance with the Emperor . . .

BARNY [*to* MELANIE]. What Emperor is this?

MELANIE. I don't know that either.

CINDERELLA. I've always intended to marry into royalty.

MELANIE. Do come and sit down, dear.

CINDERELLA. I'm perfectly calm. I'm just dreaming. Dance with me, Barny. Pretend you're an Emperor.

[*She gives him her hand. He drops the rugs on a chair, and gives a distraught look at* MELANIE. *She shrugs her shoulders helplessly.* BARNY *dances slowly down the room with* CINDERELLA, *and she goes on talking and smiling.*]

You look very sweet in an Imperial crown, Barny. Most royal. But your hair's all over the place. You should brush it more often.

BARNY. It just grows like this, my lady.

CINDERELLA. Now you should be falling in love with me . . . your poor heart must be breaking. Do you know what heartache is like, Barny?

BARNY. Yes, my lady.

MELANIE [*worriedly*]. The carriage will soon be here. Cinderella . . . Ellen . . . your gloves . . .

[*But* CINDERELLA *is lost in her dream.*]

CINDERELLA. Look more loving, Emperor. It's wrong to frown so. Your face is too grim.

BARNY. It's the only one I have.

[MELANIE *goes out, down left.*]

CINDERELLA. I know why you look so stern, poor

Barny. It's because you aren't really royal. You're jealous because I mean to marry a sovereign. Wouldn't you be pleased for my sake?

BARNY. I'd be happy if you were.

CINDERELLA. I would be. Very happy. What could be nicer than to marry a monarch?

BARNY. To marry the one you love.

[CINDERELLA *stops her slow dancing and stands still, staring at him. There is a pause.*]

CINDERELLA. Barny . . .

[*They stay fixed, looking deeply at one another. From up right comes the* FAIRY, *tearfully radiant. Her clothes are still smeared with ash and bramble-tattered. From the left steps the* DEMON, *frowning.*]

DEMON. This has to stop!

FAIRY. My task is all complete!
The ending's happy, and so very sweet.

DEMON. It's gone to pieces!

FAIRY. There's no more to do.
My blessing on her. And farewell to you.

DEMON. Come right back here! You can't run off like this!
The story isn't finished.

FAIRY. What's amiss?

DEMON. The coach! The Ball! The slippers made of glass!

FAIRY. But this time other things have come to pass.
Do you imagine I would interfere
With matters as they are? It's very clear
My use is over.

DEMON. No!

FAIRY. Another day
We'll work together in some other way.

[*She goes off, right.*]

DEMON. No! No! My fairy's story must come first! I promised . . . and I'll do it if I burst!

[*He rushes off, up left.* CINDERELLA *and* BARNY *come out of their apparent trance.*]

CINDERELLA. What were you saying, Barny?

BARNY. I don't remember.

[*The door, left centre, flies open and the* DEMON *rushes in, panting with exertion. He is hurriedly wrapping his pedlar's cloak round him, and clutching his tray of gauds.*]

DEMON. Any old iron?

[CINDERELLA *and* BARNY *move apart, and stare in some amazement at the* DEMON.]

BARNY. Any old what?

DEMON [*losing his head*]. Ribbons? Laces? Chocolate? Ice-cream?

CINDERELLA. Are you crazy?

DEMON. Getting on that way.

BARNY. You've come to the wrong door. Go round to the kitchen . . .

[*He goes to the door, and indicates the direction.*]

Along there, by the coach-yard . . . Oh! Here's the coach!

CINDERELLA. Warn my stepmother and my father.

BARNY. I can't go and leave you with this . . . this . . .

CINDERELLA. Go and tell them, Barny.

BARNY. My lady . . .

DEMON. Don't mind me, young sir. I'm just going. I'll get round to the back door.

[*He goes outside the door, centre, but stays just in sight.* BARNY *looks doubtful, but* CINDERELLA *smiles at him.*]

CINDERELLA. Don't worry so, Barny. What could go wrong now?

[*He smiles back, and goes off, left.* CINDERELLA *gives a happy sigh, and takes a dancing turn round the room. The* DEMON *comes back.*]

DEMON. Where are you off to, dressed like that?

CINDERELLA. Oh! I thought you'd gone!

DEMON. Not quite.

CINDERELLA. I'm going to the Palace, to dance at the royal Ball.

DEMON. In that get-up?

CINDERELLA. What do you mean, 'get-up'?

DEMON. Dressed like a milkmaid. Is it fancy dress?

CINDERELLA. Why, what's wrong with my dress?

DEMON. Nothing, if you like that sort of thing.

CINDERELLA. *What* sort of thing?

DEMON. Dull simplicity.

CINDERELLA. It's not!

DEMON. I suppose that's why your sisters chose it for you.

CINDERELLA. How dare you! Go away!

DEMON. Are their ball gowns plain and homely? Or will they be lit like candles, with jewels and ribbons, and lovely colours?

CINDERELLA [*almost in tears*]. I shall have pearls . . .

DEMON. Trinketry for a baby! How you'll be outshone! And you talked of dancing with an Emperor. You'll be sat in a dark corner, with a glass of milk!

CINDERELLA. I won't! I'll dance with whoever I please!

DEMON. Who will you please? Who will glance at you twice? Your stepsisters will take all eyes, and you'll be nothing.

CINDERELLA [*in a whisper*]. Nothing . . .

DEMON. Just Cinderella. They're taking you there to make you a laughing-stock. To show everyone what a dull little creature you are.

CINDERELLA. Oh no! They said . . .

DEMON. Do you trust them?

CINDERELLA. I'm not sure that I trust you! I know what you are.

DEMON. Oh well, if you're going to be a goody-goody prig . . .!

CINDERELLA. What's so priggish about doubting a demon?

DEMON. But I'm on your side.

CINDERELLA [*doubtfully*]. Are you?

DEMON. If your tale of woe is true, yes.

CINDERELLA. My tale . . .?

DEMON. Are you not the sad, sweet Cinderella, who grieves for her lost mother? She who is so cruelly used by a heartless stepmother, and her sneering daughters? Poor little Cinderella, weeping among the ashes. That's your story, isn't it?

[CINDERELLA *looks at him, and turns away biting her lip. He stands over her compellingly.*]

Of course, if it's all a pack of lies . . .! If your troubles are all of your own making . . .! If you've chosen to sulk in solitude . . . to nurse your wounded vanity and selfishness . . . to make everyone's life a burden with your spite and bitterness . . . if you are not the true Cinderella, but another . . . a fake . . .!

CINDERELLA [*crying*]. Don't! Don't!

DEMON. If you're just a naughty, stupid little girl . . . who has now decided to be good and pull her silly self

together . . . to make friends with those who love her, and stop being Cinderella of her own free will . . .

CINDERELLA. What then?

DEMON. Then I can do nothing. Go to the Ball, and walk meekly at your sisters' heels. Carry their fine gloves, and curtsy politely if they deign to speak to you.

CINDERELLA. If they really meant me to look dull and boring . . .

DEMON. It's easily proved. Ask them to lend you their jewels. Say you prefer to wear rubies and emeralds. They'd look splendid on that white dress. You'd glitter like an Empress indeed! If they lend them to you without question, then they mean you well. If they refuse, my suspicions are proved.

CINDERELLA. In which case, I won't go.

DEMON. You stick to that. Pardon me!

[*He vanishes behind the wall, left, to* CINDERELLA'S *astonishment.* BARNY *comes in down left, and holds the door open for* DAME MARGARET, MELANIE *and* MELISSA.]

MARGARET [*as she enters*]. We've been so long! Melissa had lost her gloves, and we had to find another matching pair.

CINDERELLA. I've been thinking . . .

MARGARET. Barny, go and tell the Baron that we're waiting, will you? He's quite ready . . . at least he was. But he went into the library . . . and he's probably forgotten all about everything . . . deep in a book.

BARNY. I'll remind him, madam.

MARGARET. Thank you, dear.

[BARNY *goes out down left.* MARGARET *turns*

back to CINDERELLA, *who is scraping her foot in the ashes.*]

Oh, darling, you'll make your slipper dirty! Come and see what I have here.

CINDERELLA. I've been thinking.

MARGARET. So you said before. And what about?

CINDERELLA. I'm not sure that I'm coming to this Ball.

MELANIE. } What!
MELISSA. }

MARGARET. No more joking, now. Let me fasten your pearls.

CINDERELLA. I'd rather wear rubies, or emeralds.

MARGARET. Either would look frightful on you, dear. You're far too young for that sort of ornament. Don't be silly.

CINDERELLA. I am *not* silly. Though I know you think I am. You want me to look a ninny! Well, I won't!

MELANIE [*anxiously*]. You look perfectly sweet.

CINDERELLA. I've seen through your wicked game, and I won't play!

MARGARET. Ellen, what on earth can you mean?

MELISSA. What are you doing?

CINDERELLA. Staying here!

MARGARET. You're doing nothing of the sort, you naughty child! How can you be so troublesome, and unkind! Were you only pretending to be gay and happy, just to distress us more with your change of mood? We were looking forward to such a merry evening . . .

CINDERELLA [*coldly*]. Go and have it.

[*She speaks with sullenly averted face, kicking the ashes idly.*]

MELISSA. Do you expect us to go without you?

MELANIE. We'd be miserable.

MELISSA. Whatever would people say?

CINDERELLA. Ah, that's your true concern. Tell them I prefer the ashes to your company.

MARGARET. Be done with this nonsense, Ellen, and stop kicking the hearth. Of course you're coming.

CINDERELLA. Only if I can wear emeralds and rubies.

MARGARET. You will most certainly not deck yourself in gaudy jewels at your age. You'll have these beautiful pearls, and look sweet.

[*She holds out the necklace.* CINDERELLA *snatches it from her hands, and breaks the string. The pearls are scattered on the floor.* CINDERELLA *throws herself down by the hearth, and stares into the fire with a face of stone. There is a shocked pause.*]

You have grieved me greatly.

[*The* BARON *enters, down left. He carries a book, and is in shirt-sleeves.* BARNY *follows with his coat.*]

BARON. Forgotten all about this do. Mustn't keep the horses standing much longer in the cold. I was reading. They'll get rheumatism. Penguins and that.

BARNY. Penguins, sir?

BARON. Most intriguing. Habits and customs. Black and white. Stones for nests, you know.

BARNY. Oh, I see. You were reading about them.

BARON. That's obvious. You don't concentrate. And what about rugs?

BARNY. Er . . . oh, they're here, sir. All ready.

[*He puts down the* BARON'S *coat, and picks up the rugs.*]

MARGARET. James, we're not going.

BARON. Got to. Have to see a man about the government. Whole future. Most important. Then there's the horses.

MARGARET. Cinder . . . Ellen says she won't come.

MELISSA. It's not fair! We were so happy.

MARGARET. James, I won't leave her here all alone.

MELANIE. I'll stay.

MELISSA. So will I. You go, Mother. We'll both stay with her.

BARON. Nonsense. No need at all. Don't worry, or you'll get headaches. Come along, do. Horses will be stiff for a week. Cold as penguins.

[*He gestures them towards the centre doors.* BARNY *holds one open for them. They move with great reluctance.*]

MELISSA. We can't just go off and leave her!

BARON. She'll be well looked after.

MELISSA. Who will look after her?

BARON. Was introduced. Got my papers, Barny? Good boy. Had a pretty dress.

MELISSA. Barny had?

BARON. No, no, dear. Do avoid muddled thinking. She's got a good fairy.

[*He herds* MELISSA *out, after* DAME MARGARET *and* MELANIE. BARNY *casts a last hopeless look at* CINDERELLA, *and goes off after them. The doors are closed. From outside comes the sound of wheels and hoof-beats dying away in the distance.*

CINDERELLA *springs up, and runs to the doors. She opens one, and for a moment it seems she may call them back. But she turns again. She leans on*

the door-post, with furrowed brow and sullen mouth. Then she goes and gathers up the fallen pearls, knotting them into her handkerchief. She looks speculatively at her skirts, and then kilts them up. She puts on the BARON'S *coat, left behind by* BARNY *in his confusion. It is very much too big for her, of course. She tucks her hair into the collar, straining it back tightly from her face. She looks rather weird. She crosses the room, adopting what she obviously considers a manly stride. Then she goes with determination to the door again.*

The FAIRY *steps from the shadows up right.*]

FAIRY [*icily*]. Are you going somewhere?

[CINDERELLA *starts violently, and then turns to stare coldly back.*]

CINDERELLA. I'm running away to sea.

FAIRY. Disguised as a boy?

CINDERELLA. Naturally.

FAIRY. It will get you nowhere.

CINDERELLA. That remains to be seen.

FAIRY. I'm almost tempted to let you try.

CINDERELLA. How can you stop me?

[*She turns again to go, and is half-way through the door when the* FAIRY *finds a voice of great authority.*]

FAIRY. Come here at once!

[CINDERELLA *looks back, startled by the tone.*]

And shut the door. It's freezing!

CINDERELLA. I'm going . . .

FAIRY. If you go out like that, you'll be locked up as a dangerous lunatic!

CINDERELLA. Oh.

[*She comes in slowly, and closes the door.*]

FAIRY. Thank you. Now, kindly explain what's going on here. Last time I saw you, all was set fair.

CINDERELLA. Then *he* came.

FAIRY. Who?

CINDERELLA. The . . . the pedlar. You know?

FAIRY [*grimly*]. I know.

CINDERELLA. He said I was being mocked. They were only pretending to be kind . . .

FAIRY. Did he indeed?

CINDERELLA. And he was right. I proved it. And they all went off, and left me here, alone and miserable.

FAIRY. That seems rather unlikely to me.

CINDERELLA. They did! My father made them. He said . . . but he rambles rather.

FAIRY. How strange! I heard you weeping from far away, so I came back.

CINDERELLA [*with a sniff*]. I wasn't weeping. I don't care, really.

FAIRY. I heard the tears in your mind. I thought you were just being tiresome again. But if they truly refused to take you . . . then they are indeed cruel and selfish!

CINDERELLA [*carefully*]. It wasn't . . . quite like that. I . . . I didn't want to go. I wouldn't go! The pedlar said not to.

FAIRY. I see it all. Say no more. You're going to the Ball, whether you like it or not!

CINDERELLA. You can't make me.

FAIRY. We'll see about that. I've never yet had to descend to actual force . . .

CINDERELLA. I wouldn't be found dead there!

FAIRY. Don't tempt me.

CINDERELLA. The pedlar told me not to go unless I could be dressed in splendour like a candle-flame! Jewelled like an Empress! Crowned and glittering!

FAIRY. *Very well!*

CINDERELLA [*startled*]. What!

FAIRY. You shall have garnishes to end all garnish! You'll be prinked and bedizened like a May Queen! Spangled from top to toe with diamonds the size of Sirius! Emeralds like Easter eggs! Rubies like roses! Amethyst . . . moonstone . . . sapphire . . .

CINDERELLA. Will it suit me?

FAIRY. No, you'll look revolting!

CINDERELLA. I won't go.

FAIRY. Indeed you will, my girl.

[*She lifts her wand.*]

All magic powers, on you I call . . .
Prepare the greatest spells of all.

[*She turns to the nervously defiant girl.*]

Cinderella, bring me the pumpkin from the kitchen.

CINDERELLA. No.

FAIRY. You can't say that.

CINDERELLA. I have.

FAIRY. Then I'm stuck.

[*The* DEMON *comes in from up left.*]

DEMON. Get on with it. The pumpkin is now in position outside.

FAIRY. I'll have a word with you later.

DEMON. I hoped you would.

[*The* FAIRY *glares at him.*]

FAIRY. Cinderella, bring me the mice from the trap in the cheese cupboard.

CINDERELLA. I won't.

DEMON. The mice are out there with the pumpkin.

FAIRY. Are you in charge of this job?

DEMON [*hastily*]. No, no . . . not at all! You are. I'm just giving a bit of a helping hand.

FAIRY. So it would appear. However . . . Cinderella, there is a large rat in the kitchen trap . . .

[CINDERELLA *screams. The* FAIRY *drops her wand, and the* DEMON *picks it up and hands it back.*]

Why did you do that? What a fright you gave me!

CINDERELLA. I don't like rats.

FAIRY. Nor do I. But there's no call to shriek like an owl! Go and bring the trap.

CINDERELLA. If you think I'll carry a horrible great rat with a fat tail and red eyes . . .

FAIRY. It's in a trap.

CINDERELLA. I don't care if it's in a trance. I won't.

FAIRY. Smith . . .

DEMON. I don't like rats, either.

FAIRY. I suppose you want me to do it!

DEMON. I would have, but it's such a big rat.

FAIRY [*to* CINDERELLA]. If you scream again I'll smack you! Dear Demon, couldn't you possibly . . .?

DEMON. It squeaked at me.

FAIRY. Ugh!

DEMON. *The cat!*

FAIRY. Don't yell so.

DEMON. Call on the cat. He'll fetch it for you. If you lay a powerful spell on him, he might obey. Better make him bigger, too. It's a huge rat.

FAIRY. What a good idea!

CINDERELLA [*to* DEMON]. You're a wicked demon, aren't you?

DEMON. Sort of.

CINDERELLA. Will you teach me black magic?

FAIRY. Oh, for goodness' sake! How can I concentrate? Black magic, now! What next? I'd just remembered the right spell . . . how did it go?

[*She lifts her wand rather hesitantly.*]

Cat, I call on you for aid.
Leave your world of dream and shade.
King of creatures! Lord of night!
Puss, stand forth in all your might!

DEMON. Stop!

[*The lights flicker.*]

Halt the spell, and close the way!
Stop him getting through, I say!
All the magic I command
Keep him in his distant land!

[*The lights return to normal.*]

Phew!

FAIRY. What was all that for?

DEMON. Do you know what cat you nearly got?

FAIRY. Oh no! Not . . .?

DEMON. Boots and all.

FAIRY. That would have been final and absolute disaster.

DEMON. If he'd got his paws into it, nothing could ever be the same again. [*Indicating* CINDERELLA.] She'd have been calling herself the Marchioness of Carabas!

FAIRY. That's made me nervous. Let's do without cats.

DEMON. And without rats?

FAIRY. You can drive the coach.

DEMON. That *will* look pretty.

FAIRY. No one will notice you.

DEMON. Ha!

FAIRY. All eyes will be on Cinderella.

CINDERELLA. I won't be there.

DEMON. Oh, shut up! Don't you want all eyes on you, you little dolt?

CINDERELLA. Yes, but . . . yes . . .

DEMON. Then stop dragging your feet! You'll go to the Ball in a glittering coach. Dressed like a princess, with a crown on your silly head. And everyone will stare, and whisper, and wonder who you are. The King's son will dance with you, and offer you his heart . . .

FAIRY. He'll ask your name, and you'll smile, and say . . .

CINDERELLA. The Marchioness of Carabas.

FAIRY. No! Not lies! I never approved of that story. You will be the mystery . . . the lady from beyond the hills . . . the unknown beauty . . .

CINDERELLA. And get my own back on everyone.

FAIRY [*shocked*]. That isn't the idea.

CINDERELLA. I'll go! I'll laugh at my hateful stepsisters! What fools I can make of them. They said they'd curtsy to me if ever I wore a crown . . . now I'll make them do it.

FAIRY. Cinderella, this is not the right spirit.

DEMON. Never mind. It'll get her there, and that's the main thing.

[*He strikes an attitude.*]
On with the magic, Fairy! After all
Fair Cinderella's going to the Ball.
[*The* FAIRY *takes a deep breath, strikes an attitude for herself, and raises her wand. Magic takes hold of the scene.*]

FAIRY. You powers of legend, gather closely round:
The time is come. The spells are tightly wound.
[*The lights change and begin to fade. There is a faint sound of music. Even* CINDERELLA *feels enchantment growing. Her face softens, and she stands with her hands clasped in wonder.*]
Here stands young Cinderella; this her night.
Clothe her from head to foot in beauty bright:
See that her moment no mistaking mars!
Let her wear moonlight, with a crown of stars.
[*The lights have faded to darkness. All that is left is a glimmer of white radiance round the* FAIRY.]
Here is the true enchantment. This the dream:
The song the poets sing; the glimpse; the gleam
Of lovely worlds beyond the spinning earth:
The tale in which all magic has its birth;
Tender and gentle, sweetest of them all . . .
Dear Cinderella, going to the Ball.
[*The lights fade up.* CINDERELLA *is wearing a softly-gleaming ball gown, lovely with pearls. Pearls are in her tiny crown, and on her wrists and throat. She looks perfectly adorable, and in a complete daze.*]
Now for the coach and horses!

DEMON. Hold it, dear!

FAIRY. Be quiet! You've got no business to be here!
Now for the coach and horses! And then . . . lo!
Off to the Ball!

DEMON. Barefooted?

FAIRY. What? Oh, no!

[CINDERELLA *lifts her wide skirts a fraction, and they look at her small, bare feet.*]
Idiots! I could snap my wand in half!
Is this the time to try and get a laugh?
Now, by my magic . . .! Quickly! Put it right!
Bring the glass slippers, or you'll rue the night!
[*The lights flicker momentarily.*]
Where are they? Fancy leaving those behind!
[*The* DEMON, *kneeling, holds out a pair of glittering transparent shoes.*]

DEMON. I went and got them for you.

FAIRY. You're too kind!
[*The* DEMON *holds the slippers for* CINDERELLA. *She puts them on, and moves gracefully round, admiring them. She curtsies to the* FAIRY, *then to the* DEMON.]
Now for the coach.

DEMON. Who's going to drive it?

FAIRY. You.

DEMON. It's wrong!

FAIRY. But it's the best that we can do!
[BARNY *enters, down left. He stops in his tracks when he sees* CINDERELLA.]

BARNY. I came back . . . for the Baron's . . . coat. I . . . is that you, my lady?

CINDERELLA. Do I look nice, Barny?

BARNY. You look . . . I . . . it's like magic. I never in my life . . .! Lovely . . . my lady . . .

CINDERELLA. Would you drive me to the Palace, Barny?

BARNY. I'd . . . I'd drive you . . . anywhere . . . always . . . my lady.

FAIRY. Then wait outside.
[BARNY *moves up centre, bemused and unseeing.*]
No! go the other way.
You'll knock the pumpkin over.
BARNY. I obey.
[*He goes out hazily, down left. The* FAIRY *waves her wand.*]
FAIRY. We should have made a coachman from a rat.
The boy shall take his place, and that is that.
Now nothing else can possibly go wrong . . .
DEMON. The warning.
FAIRY. What?
DEMON. Midnight. You know . . . ding-dong!
FAIRY. Of course! Now, Cinderella, heed me well;
The stroke of midnight ends this magic spell:
You must leave long before, or you will be
In rags!
CINDERELLA. I might have guessed!
FAIRY. Don't fluster me!
Your interruption I will not reproach.
The moment's come for me to call the coach.
[*And she waves her wand. Everything grows suddenly quite dark. Music sounds softly. Light streams down outside the wide-opened central doors, and the coach and horses are waiting there. White and glittering. Almost transparent. Entirely magic. Like a frozen dream. Soft rays fall on the* FAIRY, *and on the* DEMON, *and* CINDERELLA. *The last-named clasps her hands in ecstasy.*]
Off with you, child. May all go as it should.
Beware of midnight! And . . . oh, do be good!
[CINDERELLA *goes out to the coach. From the*

shadows steps a coachman to open the door for her. She gets in, seats herself, and waves happily to the FAIRY, *who waves happily back. The coachman turns and goes towards the horses. If it is* BARNY, *it is not easy to recognize him, for he has the head of a rat.*

CINDERELLA *does not see this phenomenon. But the* FAIRY *gives a cry of horror, snaps her wand across her knee, and covers her face with her hands. The* DEMON *kneels, retrieves the broken wand, and holds it out to her humbly.*]

CURTAIN

ACT III SCENE I

THE PALACE GARDENS, THAT NIGHT

Tall trees to left and right have lighted lanterns hanging from their branches, and shedding a soft gleam over the secluded little lawn. At the back is a stone balustrade, broken in the centre by a pair of shallow steps, which are flanked on either side by decorative urns, and lead to a farther part of the gardens. There is a carved stone seat down left, and a small fountain on the right. BARNY *is sitting on the steps, despondently. At least, one assumes it to be* BARNY, *though he still has a rat's head.*
The BARON *enters, down right, carrying a flagon of wine, two glasses, and a plate of sandwiches. He crosses carefully to the steps.*

BARON. Here we are, Barny, boy.

[*So it is* BARNY. *The* BARON *should know.*]

BARNY [*jumping up*]. Oh! Oh, it's you, sir. I was afraid . . .

BARON. Now, now! No call to be jumpy. Everyone's busy dancing and that. Sit down and have your supper.

[*He puts his collection on the steps, assisted by* BARNY. *Then they both seat themselves, and the* BARON *fills the glasses.*]

I suppose you *can* eat a sandwich?

BARNY. I haven't tried yet.

BARON [*raising his glass*]. The best of luck!

[*He drinks.*]

BARNY. It's very kind of you, sir, to go to all this trouble.

BARON. No trouble. Pleasure. Like to see you eat a sandwich. Lucky you found me in that dark corner of the library.

BARNY. I wouldn't have gone into the Palace, sir, but I had to bring you your coat.

BARON. If the women had seen you!

[*He chuckles happily, and watches* BARNY *trying to drink some wine.*]

Try sucking it up from the middle. Wife and the girls . . . wouldn't care for your looks. Make a fuss. Don't go choking yourself! Yell and fall about.

BARNY. Who, me?

BARON. Wife and girls. Your head, you know. Women! Such drama about everything. Can't take life calmly. Must fuss. Have a fit if they saw you. But you don't scream and foam.

BARNY. What good would it do?

BARON. Exactly. Just what I always ask myself. All sort itself out, anyway. Things do. Come out in the wash. Probably magic, too.

BARNY. Probably magic what?

BARON. Washes out.

BARNY. I hope so.

BARON. Like some more?

BARNY. Magic?

BARON. Sandwiches.

BARNY. I'd better not.

BARON. Ah well, it was worth trying. Worth watching too. You're a good fellow, Barny. I only wish . . . never mind. Can't tell with women. No use wishing or wondering. Get their own way in the end, somehow. Don't take it too hard, boy.

BARNY. I'm not sure that I quite follow you, sir.

BARON. Oh yes, you do.

[*He pats* BARNY *kindly on the shoulder.*]

Heart can suffer a terrific lot without anything actually breaking. Stiffen your whiskers, and stop drooping your ears. What's more . . . better get out of sight! Someone coming! Here . . . take the plate!

[BARNY *runs up the steps and vanishes into the shadows beyond. The* BARON *goes on placidly sipping wine.* MELANIE *and* MELISSA *come in down right together.*]

MELISSA. Stepfather! Isn't it lovely!

[*She runs to him, and he looks into his wine-glass.*]

BARON. Delicious.

MELANIE. Dear sir, have you seen her?

BARON. Who hasn't! What's she up to now?

MELANIE. She's dancing with the Prince again. And how she's enjoying herself! How she's laughing! Like a happy baby . . . and so pretty.

MELISSA. Where did you get that lovely dress for her? When did you plan all this?

BARON [*vaguely*]. Sort itself out in the wash.

MELANIE. You should be scolded for such a trick!

[*She stoops to kiss the top of his head as he sits on the steps.*]

We were so unhappy, thinking of her there all alone at home. And then . . . as though a wand had been waved . . .! How clever of you both to give us such a surprise.

BARON. Gave me a bit of a turn.

MELISSA. You couldn't guess it would seem so like magic. That glittering coach and horses! Like a dream! And she like a princess from an old fairy-tale, bless her. She looked at us with eyes as round as a kitten's, and we knew we weren't supposed to recognize her.

MELANIE. You nearly gave it away, you silly!

MELISSA. I know! I said 'Cinder . . .'! And then I coughed like anything, so I don't think she heard. Weren't you proud of her, stepfather?

BARON. Hid in the library. No coat. Barny found me later.

MELANIE. Oh, where is he?

BARON. Over there . . . no, over *there*!

MELISSA. Let's go and find him. I promised him a dance.

BARON. Wouldn't if I were you. Fuss and fall about.

MELISSA. What can you mean?

BARON. Not quite himself.

MELANIE. Is he ill?

BARON. Just wants to be left alone.

MELANIE [*doubtfully*]. If you say so, sir.

[DAME MARGARET *enters, down right, on the arm of* DANNY.]

BARON. Ah, my dear. Come and sit down.

[*He crosses to join her on the garden seat.*]

Nice out here, eh?

MARGARET. Cooler. All those candles in the Ballroom make one's eyes ache after a while. [*To* DANNY.] Thank you, my lord, for dancing with an old lady.

DANNY. If ever I heard anyone fish for a compliment, madam . . .!

[*They all laugh.*]

May I bring you some wine? All of you?

BARON. Got some, me boy.

MARGARET. And two glasses? Who have you been entertaining? Should I be jealous?

BARON. Don't think so. Sort of an animal.

MARGARET. Now you're not to muddle us!

DANNY. Drinking *wine*?

BARON. Didn't get far with it. Whiskers in the way.

DANNY. What sort of animal . . .?

MARGARET. Don't let him lure you into his verbal mazes, my lord. He does it for fun. [*Firmly changing the subject.*] The Prince must be very happy tonight. It's the most successful party I can remember.

DANNY [*to* BARON]. Where did it come from?

[MARGARET *takes him away down left.* MELISSA *ranges up on his farther side.*]

BARON. Kind of big rat. From the Palace.

MELISSA [*to* DANNY]. Is the Prince enjoying himself?

DANNY. What? Oh yes, indeed he is. A *rat*!

MARGARET. Sir, it is not polite to turn your attention elsewhere when two ladies are asking questions.

MELANIE. Three ladies.

[DANNY *gives up. He casts one wondering look at the* BARON, *who grins, and then concentrates on the said ladies.*]

DANNY. The Prince is in a seventh heaven.

MELISSA. Indeed, he looks as though he's dreaming.

DANNY. He always does. It's a bit deceptive, really. He's extremely wide-awake under that romantic look. But tonight he does seem truly bemused.

MARGARET [*happily*]. Perhaps he's in love.

DANNY. That's just what I thought.

MELANIE. Who could blame him? The . . . the little princess is so enchanting.

DANNY. Isn't she a poppet? And nobody knows her name!

BARON. We know . . .

MARGARET. James!

BARON. That she's come here incognito. In a coach. In a flash and a temper!

DANNY [*to* MARGARET]. Is the Baron all right?

MARGARET. Take no notice. It's very romantic that the princess has no name. Such an original idea.

BARON. Women!

MELISSA. It does make it more exciting.

DANNY. Yes, I suppose it might . . . if . . .

[*He glances off right.*]

Look, that dance is over. The Prince is leading his partner from the Ballroom. Lady Melissa, may I beg . . .

MELISSA. I'd be happy to dance with you later, sir. But just let's wait here a moment, and speak to her. They're coming this way.

MARGARET. So they are. James, if you say one word . . .!

MELANIE. Listen to her laughing!

[*The* PRINCE *enters with* CINDERELLA. *She*

stops laughing as the others bow or curtsy to them, and eyes her relatives haughtily.]

CINDERELLA. Have I met these ladies?

PRINCE. Yes. You asked particularly that they should be presented to you.

CINDERELLA. I've forgotten them. Introduce them again.

PRINCE. If you wish. Little unknown princess, this is the Baron James of Castelgaunt.

BARON. Hallo, my dear. Glad to see you looking so neat and clean.

MARGARET. James, please!

PRINCE. Dame Margaret of Castelgaunt.

[MARGARET *curtsies to* CINDERELLA, *and puts up a gentle hand to press back a stray curl from the girl's forehead.*]

The Lady Melanie.

MELANIE [*to* CINDERELLA]. Your Highness.

[*She smiles at her, and curtsies low.*]

CINDERELLA [*with great condescension*]. I do trust you have managed to find partners.

MELANIE [*meekly*]. Only very dull ones, and elderly, I fear.

[CINDERELLA *smiles back at her. She is enjoying this game, and there is not any great malice in her teasing. But the* PRINCE *joins in, and* CINDERELLA *begins to get irritable as he speaks.*]

PRINCE. What utter nonsense, my lady Melanie! You've never once been without some dashing cavalier . . . and for every dance! I've been waiting impatiently for a chance to ask you again . . .

MELANIE [*interrupting firmly*]. And this is my sister Melissa.

[MELISSA *sinks into a profound curtsy at* CINDERELLA'S *feet. The temper of the latter has taken another turn for the worse.*]

CINDERELLA [*distantly*]. How does she do?

MELISSA. Fairly well, Your Highness.

DANNY. Far too well for my liking.

[*But these compliments to her stepsisters have driven* CINDERELLA *into a mood of aggression.*]

CINDERELLA. Haven't you a stepsister? Younger than yourselves?

MELISSA [*not seeing the danger signals*]. How did you hear of her, Your Highness? Our family is surely too humble to be discussed in your high circles.

MARGARET [*smiling*]. You mean our little Ellen?

CINDERELLA. I don't see her here.

BARON. No mirror.

MELISSA [*quickly*]. She preferred to stay at home.

CINDERELLA. Weeping among the ashes.

MELISSA. How did you guess?

CINDERELLA. I've heard tales that you ill-use her cruelly.

MELISSA. Who starts these rumours?

BARON. The Chancellor.

PRINCE. The *Chancellor*?

BARON. Over there. Must have a word with him.

[*He starts to go off, and pauses by* CINDERELLA *to speak to her with some severity.*]

Don't go too far, miss. End in tears.

[*He goes off.*]

CINDERELLA [*harshly*]. I've heard it said that you starve the girl you call Cinderella! Beat her, and mock at her!

PRINCE. Now come . . . that's most unlikely.

CINDERELLA. I think it extremely probable. You've only to look at them!

PRINCE. I am looking.

DANNY. As if these ladies could ever be cruel to a child! I've never heard anything more ridiculous!

[*He roars with laughter.* CINDERELLA *stamps her foot.*]

CINDERELLA. Don't laugh so! It isn't funny! It's horrible! It's tragic!

MARGARET. Only if it were true.

CINDERELLA Do you accuse me of lying? The Prince will protect me from your insults!

MARGARET. Child, don't make me feel ashamed of you.

CINDERELLA. Be ashamed of yourself!

[*She turns on the* PRINCE, *who is looking more than usually abstracted, and* DANNY, *who is frankly amazed, and indicates her relatives with one dramatically accusing hand.*]

Look how they pretend to be pained and sorrowful! Are you taken in? They're not the persons you think. They're two-faced, false-hearted, mealy-mouthed . . .!

PRINCE. Princesss, enough!

CINDERELLA. Well, they are! They're like witches, only worse! For at least you know where you are with witches!

PRINCE. You don't know what you're saying.

DANNY. It's the heat. All these candles . . .! Let me bring a glass of water . . .

CINDERELLA. No . . . no . . . I don't want . . .

[*She looks round at everyone, and then averts her head, and moves quickly to the fountain. She leans*

her head against the stone. MELANIE *gives a small sob.*]

PRINCE. Lady Melanie . . .

MELISSA. It's all right, sir. We'll . . . just go and . . . look at the roses . . . Melanie . . .

[*She takes* MELANIE's *hand, and the sisters go quickly up the steps and off.*]

DANNY. Roses? At this time of year?

[*He makes a move to follow them, but the* PRINCE *puts a hand on his arm.*]

PRINCE. No. Please attend me, Danny.

[*He goes to* DAME MARGARET.]

May I take you back to the Ballroom, my lady?

MARGARET [*with dignity*]. If you could send for my husband, sir.

PRINCE. Danny, bring the Baron to the terrace.

[DANNY *salutes, and goes off, down left. The* PRINCE *starts to follow, with* DAME MARGARET. CINDERELLA *speaks in a low and shaken voice.*]

CINDERELLA. Madam . . . I . . . I . . . didn't . . . not really . . . I didn't mean to make them cry.

MARGARET [*quietly*]. Didn't you?

[*She goes off with the* PRINCE. CINDERELLA *puts her hands to her head.*]

CINDERELLA. How dim the lights have gone! I've pulled the moon out of the sky, and made everything dark again. I thought it would be fun to tease them a little . . . to make them angry. But they were sad. And every word I said felt like prickles under my tongue! What have I done, to be made so unhappy! And alone again. Always and always alone! No one to care what becomes of me . . . oh no, no! . . .

stop pretending! Why should anyone care? I'm only me. And is there anyone to love Cinderella?

[BARNY *has come in quietly, and has been standing in the shadows. He speaks softly.*]

BARNY. Yes, my lady.

CINDERELLA. Who's there?

BARNY. Don't look. I'm nothing but a shadow.

CINDERELLA. It's Barny! I know your voice, shadow.

[*She runs to him, and without a glance at his face—luckily for her nervous system—she buries hers on his shoulder. He stiffens apprehensively.*]

Oh, Barny! I've been horrid!

BARNY. Don't cry now.

CINDERELLA. The Prince won't like me any more.

BARNY. He won't notice what you do. He's in a dream.

CINDERELLA. But . . . can he love me?

BARNY. How can he help it?

CINDERELLA. That makes me more miserable.

BARNY. Do you love him?

CINDERELLA. Naturally. He's the Prince.

BARNY. There's that, of course.

[CINDERELLA *turns away, and moves pettishly back to the fountain. She still has not looked at* BARNY *properly.*]

CINDERELLA. If you're going to turn up your nose at me, you can take yourself off. You're in no position to criticize!

BARNY. You're right there.

[*He wanders miserably back into the shadows.*]

CINDERELLA. You always try to make me feel mean.

[*She turns, and finds herself alone.*]

Barny! Where are you? Don't hide!

BARNY [*off*]. I'm best hidden, my lady. Leave me be.

CINDERELLA. Have I offended you, too? Oh, I didn't mean to! And you drove the coach for me . . . and I never spared one glance for you! Barny . . . don't leave me . . .!

[*She sinks on the steps in a mournful huddle.*]

Now they've all gone.

[*The* PRINCE *enters, down left. He stands looking at her for a moment, thoughtfully.*]

PRINCE. Poor little princess.

CINDERELLA. You go away!

[*But he crosses to sit beside her. He speaks to her as though she were a much-loved little sister.*]

PRINCE. Here . . . have my handkerchief. Mop up. Tell me what's gone so wrong.

[CINDERELLA *rubs her eyes, and blows her nose, sniffing dolefully.*]

CINDERELLA. I've been horrible to everyone.

PRINCE. Not to me.

CINDERELLA. Any moment now.

PRINCE. You couldn't be truly horrible.

CINDERELLA. You don't know me very well, do you!

PRINCE. You could tell me.

CINDERELLA. No!

PRINCE. Then keep your secret, Princess.

CINDERELLA. What would you do if I wasn't a princess?

PRINCE. I'd remain absolutely calm.

CINDERELLA. Well, as a matter of fact, I'm . . .

PRINCE. To me you are an enchanting and unknown princess. Nothing you say can alter that.

CINDERELLA [*wistfully*]. You're awfully nice.

PRINCE. So are you.

CINDERELLA. Oh, don't! If you knew! There are times when I quite despair of me.

PRINCE. I can see you're very unhappy.

CINDERELLA [*sighing*]. Some people have tragic lives.

PRINCE. Yes, some do. And there are those who *make* their lives tragic. Perhaps they are sadder still . . . for they are the ones without courage.

CINDERELLA. Oh . . .

PRINCE. The ones who know in their secret hearts what fools they are. True loneliness is for a bitter mind.

[*There is a slight pause.* CINDERELLA *speaks in a small, high voice.*]

CINDERELLA. What is your opinion about stepsisters?

PRINCE. Why, any sister is better than none.

CINDERELLA. And . . . a . . . stepmother?

PRINCE. I never knew my own mother at all. It would have been nice if there'd been someone . . .

[*A small silence.* DANNY *enters, down left. He stops when he sees them, and salutes.*]

Now what? Can't you keep out of trouble for five consecutive minutes? What have you been doing?

DANNY. If I might speak! The Chancellor—I'm sorry to butt in, and all that—but the Chancellor wants to know where you are.

PRINCE. If you tell him I'll have you cashiered!

DANNY. He wants to talk to you.

PRINCE. I'm otherwise engaged.

DANNY. So I see.

PRINCE. Don't be impertinent.

DANNY. Yes, well, what am I to tell him?

PRINCE. Tell him you're me.

DANNY. Tell him what?

PRINCE. You're not concentrating, Danny. Go to the Chancellor, and say you're me. He's so short-sighted that he'd never notice. Talk to him kindly, and he'll pour out his sorrows on your sympathetic shoulder.

DANNY. And suppose I don't want his sorrows on my sympath . . .

PRINCE. Do what you're told.

DANNY. Well, honestly!

PRINCE. Get on with it. And for pity's sake don't go upsetting the old boy. He's short-tempered, as well as short-sighted! Be tactful, if that's possible for you.

DANNY [*crossly*]. I'll do my best to obey Your Highness's commands.

PRINCE. So I should hope.

[*He turns back to* CINDERELLA, *and* DANNY *salutes, and goes off.*]

Now, where were we?

CINDERELLA [*sadly*]. I meant to break all hearts here tonight.

PRINCE. You haven't done too badly.

CINDERELLA. I wanted everyone to die for love of me.

PRINCE. Then who would be left for you to love?

CINDERELLA. Why, there would always be . . .

[*She gives an uncontrollable shiver.*]

It's cold. It's grown suddenly cold.

PRINCE. It's late. Come back to the Palace, and dance again.

CINDERELLA. What time is it?

PRINCE. Nearly midnight, I suppose.

CINDERELLA. *How* nearly?

PRINCE. The bell will ring from the clock-tower. Are you afraid of midnight?

CINDERELLA. Terrified!

PRINCE. What could happen, silly?

CINDERELLA. You could think even less of me than you do now. Good-bye!

PRINCE. Here . . . you can't run off just like that!

[*He catches her hand.*]

And I have the very highest opinion of you, Princess.

CINDERELLA. You're laughing at me!

PRINCE. You mustn't go without your cloak . . . let me call your servants . . . your coach . . .

CINDERELLA. I must hurry, or they'll be gone.

PRINCE. What do you mean?

CINDERELLA. Let me go!

PRINCE. Why are you so frightened?

CINDERELLA. Let me go!

PRINCE. Do be sensible!

CINDERELLA. Don't be a fool!

[*She slaps his hand hard, and he releases her. She gives him a look of dismay. The bell from a distant clock-tower begins to chime for midnight.* CINDERELLA *gives a wild cry, and runs up the steps and out of sight. The* PRINCE *stands rubbing his hand thoughtfully.*

DAME MARGARET *enters from the left, with the* BARON.]

MARGARET. Was that Ellen who cried out?

BARON. Said it would end in tears. Always the same. Fuss, fuss!

[MELANIE *and* MELISSA *enter, right.*]

MELISSA [*to* PRINCE]. Sir . . . what has happened? We saw her running . . . in rags . . .

MELANIE. And her pretty crown was gone.

PRINCE. She fled as midnight struck. Screamed and fled, like a thing bewitched. She was under a spell, poor child. And what can I do to help her, now? I don't even know her name.

BARON. I think I can assist you there.

[*There is a flash of white light, and the* FAIRY *is standing at the top of the steps. Despite her increasing dishevelment, she looks triumphant as she lifts her broken wand.*]

FAIRY. Hold!

[*Everyone holds. Except the* BARON, *who ambles amiably in her direction.*]

BARON. Good evening, my dear. Thought you'd be hanging around. Bit late for the party. No sandwiches.

[*The* FAIRY *ignores this, quite rightly. She concentrates on the* PRINCE *and the job in hand.*]

FAIRY. Though all seems lost, yet love will find its way:
Midnight will pass, and darkness turn to day.
Desolate as you are, sad and alone,
You still may find the beautiful unknown.
Do not despair! Take courage, royal sir!
There is one way you may recover her.

PRINCE. What's that?

FAIRY. Through all your Father's kingdom wide
To castle, house and cottage you must ride,
And ask of every maiden as you pass
If she can wear that slipper made of glass.

PRINCE. What slipper?

[*There is a stricken pause. The* FAIRY *casts an agonized look all round; she gives a small moan.*

The DEMON *enters, down left. He sneaks self-consciously up centre between the amazed mortals, creeps sideways up the steps past the rigid* FAIRY, *drops the glass slipper on the top step, and vanishes behind the balustrade.*]

FAIRY [*weakly*]. Well, *that* slipper.

CURTAIN

ACT III SCENE II

THE EDGE OF THE FOREST, DAWN

Though the trees have not yet shaken night out of their branches, the misty light is slowly creeping up on them. The birds are busy with their dawn chorus. CINDERELLA *is fast asleep. Curled up among the roots of a tree, she lies in an exhausted small heap, almost invisible in the half-light. Her feet are bare, and she wears her usual ragged dress. A brown cloak is wrapped carefully round her, and she clutches one glass slipper closely to her breast.*

She is easily overlooked by the BARON *and* DAME MARGARET, *as they enter together, down right. The* BARON *carries a lighted lantern.*

BARON. Nearly dawn now. Don't need this any more.
[*He blows out the light in the lantern.*]

MARGARET. Do you really think she's all right, James?

BARON. She'll come home. Like sheep.

MARGARET. What do you mean, 'like sheep'?

BARON. Bringing their tails behind them.

MARGARET. Oh. Well, I hope you're right. Poor child.

BARON. Silly child! Rushing off like that. Should have waited for us.

MARGARET. If she was under a spell, she probably felt rather foolish in front of the Prince.

BARON. Did her level best to make a fool of herself in front of everybody! Never thinks. Headstrong. Like her mother.

MARGARET. Gillian was a dear.

BARON. Certainly. But headstrong. Have her own way though the skies fell.

MARGARET. But she thought of others, not only herself. She put her child's happiness into my hands . . . and I've failed her. But, James, I did try so hard!

BARON. So would saints and angels.

MARGARET. Would what?

BARON. Fail.

MARGARET [*sadly*]. We'd better go home. She may have come back while we've been searching for her.

BARON. Girls are there.

MARGARET. I think they're out in the forest, too. No one has slept tonight.

BARON. As she probably hoped.

[*They go off, down left.* BARNY *steps out of the shadows up right, and watches them go. He looks down at the motionless* CINDERELLA.]

BARNY. You're not asleep, my lady. You heard all that, didn't you?

[CINDERELLA *sits up, and eyes him watchfully.*]

CINDERELLA. What are you doing here?

BARNY. Guarding you.

CINDERELLA. Since when?

BARNY. Most of the night.

CINDERELLA. Why didn't you take me home?

BARNY. I don't know the way. It might be miles.

CINDERELLA. You could have told my father I was here, just now.

BARNY. I saw you stir, and waited for you to tell him.

CINDERELLA. So you've been here all the time! And I thought I was alone . . . lost in a great forest . . . sleeping under a blanket of leaves . . .

BARNY. You just make romantic pictures of everything, my lady. What you have there is my old brown cloak.

CINDERELLA. Oh . . . I didn't notice.

BARNY. You never do.

[*Cinderella rises and goes to him, with the cloak on her arm. She touches his hand.*]

CINDERELLA. You're so cold. Poor Barny. What were you guarding me from? Wolves and demons?

BARNY. Mice and bats.

CINDERELLA. You have the most prosaic mind.

BARNY. Someone has to. We'd best start looking for a path. It's nearly daylight.

CINDERELLA. I'm not sure that I mean to go home!

BARNY. Do you want them to go mad with worrying?

CINDERELLA. They won't be that concerned.

BARNY. You know better.

[*There is a little pause.* CINDERELLA *sighs.*]

CINDERELLA. I suppose I'll have to go back.

BARNY. Besides, the Prince will be coming to find his unknown lady. You must be there to put on the glass shoe.

CINDERELLA. Why?

BARNY. To prove it's yours, of course.

CINDERELLA. I've got the other. Look.

BARNY. Then that will clinch the matter.

CINDERELLA. It was awful when I found I'd lost one. It sort of vanished! Long after I was back in rags again. My toes are so sore and blistered with walking barefoot. I can hardly move without limping.

BARNY. Then I'll carry you, my lady.

CINDERELLA. Oh, but you're cold and cramped. Give me your hand, and I'll manage.

BARNY. Not while I've my strength left.

[*He lifts* CINDERELLA *easily in his arms, and begins to move up centre. He pauses, and they look thoughtfully at one another. The* FAIRY *steps out of the trees, right, invisible to the others.*]

FAIRY. The night is nearly over. The bright day,
Flooding the forest, lights you on your way:
Out of the bitter midnight of despair
To joy and love, and sunshine ever fair.
Even through tears, the daylight brightens fast,
Grief loses force, and morning comes at last.
The dawn is singing, and the world's aglow,
And happiness is waiting for you. Go!

[*She makes a wide circle with her wand, and the lights flicker and brighten. The trees at the back becomes transparent. Through them can be seen open fields and hedgerows, all bathed in sunshine. In the distance, the* BARON'S *castle is sitting on a low hill.*

The gauze on which the trees are painted flies away, and BARNY *begins to walk slowly towards the open ground, carrying* CINDERELLA.

If the trees are not painted on gauze then this fade-through cannot be used. In which case:]

CURTAIN

ACT III SCENE III

OUTSIDE THE FOREST, MORNING

Open fields and hedgerows are bathed in pale morning sunshine. Near by a stile leads over a fence. In the distance can be seen a rolling line of hills, with the BARON'S *castle perched on the nearest.*

The FAIRY *draws back into the trees, down right, and watches* BARNY *carrying* CINDERELLA *up centre.*

CINDERELLA. It's a pity you're not a Prince, Barny. Except for being so unromantic, you're very nice.

BARNY. Uh.

CINDERELLA. Are you content to go on all your life, just being my father's squire?

BARNY. Uh.

CINDERELLA. Can't you say anything except 'uh'?

BARNY. If I talk . . . I'll drop you . . .

[MELISSA *comes over the stile. She gives a cry when she sees them.*]

MELISSA. Oh, there you are!

[*She calls back over the fence.*]

Melanie! They're here! Barny's got her. I said he would.

[*She runs across to* CINDERELLA.]

Are you all right?

BARNY. Her feet are blistered.

MELISSA. So I should hope. Put her down.

[BARNY *lowers* CINDERELLA *to the ground, and* MELISSA *takes her by the shoulders.*]

You little wretch! I could shake you! Have you been hiding?

CINDERELLA. I've been asleep.

MELISSA. You're the only one who has. Isn't it just like you!

[MELANIE *comes over the stile.* BARNY *goes to help her.*]

What a fright you've given us! We thought you were lost in the forest . . . terrified and frantic!

[MELANIE *goes to* CINDERELLA, *and looks at her closely.*]

MELANIE. What happened? You don't look the same.

CINDERELLA. Perhaps I'm not quite the same.

MELISSA. Were you under a spell?

CINDERELLA. Yes.

MELISSA. Darling! All this time? Is that why you've been so hateful and tiresome?

MELANIE. Melissa!

MELISSA. Oh . . . I'm sorry.

CINDERELLA. I . . . I must tell you honestly . . . it wasn't through any spell that I've been . . . at least, if so it was of my own making . . .

MELANIE. And . . . is it broken now?

CINDERELLA. I don't know. I feel very peculiar! There are sort of waves of shadow ebbing and flowing through my head. My eyes are blurred and hot . . . and suddenly they seem to clear again . . .

BARNY. You've slept badly.

CINDERELLA. Barny! How can you be so damping?

BARNY. Someone has to.

MELANIE. Don't you believe she's been under enchantment?

BARNY. I think it was a temporary kind of spell. It seemed to break at midnight. At least, my bit did, so that probably went for the rest, too. But now my lady is no longer under magic. She's on her own. Whether that's a good thing remains to be seen.

MELANIE. Don't be harsh on her.

MELISSA. Perhaps someone's got to be.

[*In the distance a horn sounds.* MELANIE *turns away rather quickly.* MELISSA *runs to the left, and stands looking off.* BARNY *and* CINDERELLA *take no notice. Their attention is on one another.*]

It's the Prince!

MELANIE. Yes.

MELISSA. How did you know?

MELANIE. I . . . guessed.

MELISSA. With Captain Dannett. They're riding out of the forest towards the castle. Call them, Barny.

BARNY. Uh?

MELISSA. Call the Prince here.

BARNY. Oh . . . yes . . .

[*He goes up left, and looks off. He waves his arm.*]

Hey, there! You, sir! This way!

MELISSA [*prompting*]. Your Highness.

BARNY. Your Highness!

[*He turns back.*]

He's coming.

MELANIE. I think . . . I'm sure it would be better if we went back to the castle. This is no place . . . we must look quite frightful . . . all that night-long search in the forest . . .

MELISSA. We do look a little wild.

CINDERELLA. No, you mustn't leave me.

MELANIE. It's you the Prince has come to find. We're quite unnecessary.

CINDERELLA. You're very necessary to me. Please . . .

MELANIE. Very well. But . . . I . . .

[*She moves away, right, with averted head.*]

MELISSA. They've dismounted. And the grooms are taking the horses' reins. They look awfully cross.

CINDERELLA. The grooms or the horses?

MELISSA. The Prince and Captain Dannett. I hope nothing's wrong.

CINDERELLA. It's probably because of me. I seem to annoy everyone.

BARNY. They may not be thinking of you.

CINDERELLA. How depressing you are!

[*The* PRINCE *enters, left. He looks rather serious. He is followed by* DANNY, *carrying the glass slipper carelessly in one hand. He also seems somewhat tense.*]

Good . . . good morning.

[*The* PRINCE *casts a sombre look round them all.* DANNY *makes a glum reply.*]

DANNY. Morning.

CINDERELLA. Has something awful happened? You both look extremely disagreeable.

PRINCE. I am.

DANNY. He's in disgrace.

PRINCE. And he's under arrest.

MELISSA. Oh, why?

PRINCE. It's my father. He came back in the small hours, and he's as mad as fire.

MELANIE. With you, sir?

PRINCE. With both of us. I'm supposed to be betrothed by now. But I let the night go by, and the opportunity. I've got a reprieve until noon. After that . . . well, I suppose he can't actually have me hanged!

DANNY [*gloomily*]. He can me.

PRINCE. And I wouldn't raise a hand to stop him.

MELISSA [*to* DANNY]. What have *you* done?

PRINCE. Impersonation with intent to defraud . . . incitement to riot . . . false pretences . . . treason, and *lèse-majesté*, for a start.

DANNY. You told me to tell the Chancellor that I was you!

PRINCE. I didn't tell you to get him so mad that he'd resign!

DANNY. You said talk to him. And I did.

PRINCE. Your choice of subject was ill-chosen. Why discuss black magic . . . when everyone knows his wife's been a pink dog for years!

DANNY. I forgot.

PRINCE. Now he's walked out, and my father's livid . . . and you'll probably be imprisoned for life when we get back.

[*The* BARON *enters, looking pleased, and accompanied by* DAME MARGARET.]

BARON. Splendid!

DANNY. What's so splendid about that?

BARON. He'll be needing a new one.

PRINCE. A new what, sir?

BARON. Chancellor. Been waiting for this. Got a speech all ready. Rose-bud on the old trunk. Better get along to the Palace.

PRINCE. I came to summon you there, my lord.

CINDERELLA. Is that your only reason for coming?

PRINCE. Well, no. But I'm not sure how to go about the rest of it. So many people here . . .

[*The* FAIRY *steps out from the trees fully visible.*]

FAIRY. The more the merrier, they always say.
Also, the better the deed the better the day!
Come, try the slipper on.

PRINCE. What for?

FAIRY. To find
The fair unknown who left the shoe behind!
The spell is laid, and no escape permits . . .
The prince must wed the one the slipper fits!

BARNY. We know who left it.

FAIRY. The prince doesn't, silly!

PRINCE. Yes, I do.

FAIRY [*gratingly*]. Will you, or will you not, try on that shoe?

BARON [*to* PRINCE]. Did the King send for me officially?

PRINCE. Of course. Here's his letter. Danny! I should have given it to you before.

[DANNY *hands a letter to the* BARON, *who fumbles happily for his spectacles.*]

MARGARET. My dear, I'm so glad.

MELISSA [*to* DANNY]. Surely His Majesty will pardon you? You didn't mean to upset the Chancellor.

DANNY. As a matter of fact, I did. Of course, the King isn't sure of that, and we needn't tell him. I just thought your stepfather would be so much more efficient . . .

FAIRY. Could I have your attention for just one moment?

BARNY [*to* CINDERELLA]. My lady, you'd better take heed . . .

CINDERELLA [*to* FAIRY]. Must you go on with this?

FAIRY. Have you gone mad?

CINDERELLA. Perhaps I've gone sane.

FAIRY. Will you all *listen*! I order you!

BARON [*to* PRINCE]. Haven't had such a pleasant letter from the old man . . . that is, your royal parent . . . since I took a set off him at tennis, and got banished . . .

MARGARET. Is that why you left court?

BARON. All right now, you'll find. Rheumatism in my wrist.

[*The* FAIRY *throws down her wand, and stamps her foot.*]

FAIRY. I resign!

BARNY. Can you do that?

FAIRY. We'll see. It's never done at this juncture! But now it will be. If anyone's listening . . . let them try to stop me! I repeat . . . I resign!

[*There is a flash, and the* DEMON *arrives, bristling with aggression.*]

Oh! You!

[*The* DEMON *glares at everyone.*]

DEMON. Presumptuous mortals! If you dare defy
This powerful fairy's orders, you shall die!
Do what she now commands, or, by this hand,
You'll vanish in a flash of lightning! *And*
Never be seen again . . . or not the same!
Down on your knees, the lot! This is no game!

MARGARET [*nervously*]. Do what he says, my dears.
[*They all kneel facing the* DEMON, *except the* BARON *who is rapt in his letter.*]

DEMON [*pointing to the* FAIRY]. No, no! 'Tis she!
Take your commands from her, and not
from me.
[*They turn, still kneeling, to face the* FAIRY. *She shrugs her shoulders.*]

FAIRY. Nothing to do with me, I've just resigned.

DEMON. What utter rubbish!

FAIRY. 'Tisn't!

DEMON. Do you mind!
Now, what was it you wanted them to do?
Ah, I remember! All try on that shoe.

DANNY. All of us?

DEMON. Yes. No! Don't you jest with me.
I'm in no mood for such frivolity!
Ladies, put on that shoe at once . . .

CINDERELLA. But why?
Nobody really cares.

DEMON. Obey, or die!

FAIRY. Don't be so rough.

DEMON. Will you keep out of this!
[MARGARET *has put on the glass slipper.*]
Well, does it fit?

MARGARET. Yes.

DEMON. Something's gone amiss.

[*To* MELANIE]. You try.

[*She does so, with some reluctance.*]

I'll bet that's agony for you.

MELANIE. It's just my size.

DEMON. Who organized this shoe?

[*The* FAIRY *shrugs again. The* DEMON *turns on* MELISSA, *and she hurriedly takes the slipper, and puts it on.*]

Don't you go using force now! Let me see.

[MELISSA *shows him.*]

MELISSA. If anything, too large.

DEMON. This cannot be!

The spell's been spoken, and must be obeyed
Implicitly. The Prince shall wed the maid
Who fits the slipper. That's the way it ran?

[*He glances questioningly at the* FAIRY, *who nods glumly.*]

Don't look like that . . . we're doing all we can!

Now, Cinderella . . .

CINDERELLA. Yes?

DEMON. It's up to you.

Here is the chance to make your dreams come true.

CINDERELLA. My dreams? What dreams are those?

DEMON. If you can prove
The slipper's yours, then you may wed your love.

[*A slow smile begins to dawn on* CINDERELLA'S *face. She sits on the stile, and the* DEMON *kneels to fit the shoe on her foot. She gives an affected little cry.*]

Now what's the trouble?

CINDERELLA. Ooh, it pinches!

DEMON. Where?

CINDERELLA. On that big blister.

DEMON. Oh, it isn't fair!
It's got to fit! It must!
[*He tries to force it on. She snatches her foot away.*]

CINDERELLA. It's miles too small.

DEMON. You danced in it till midnight at the Ball!
All the glass slipper's magic must be gone
If Cinderella cannot get it on!
Fairy, do something! Use authority!

FAIRY. A splendid time to hand it on to me!
[MELANIE *goes to* CINDERELLA.]

MELANIE. You know it's yours, dear. You've got the other in your hand.

CINDERELLA. I think I found it somewhere.

DEMON. No!

FAIRY. Oh, hush! I understand everything now. There's a quiver through the air. It means a spell is almost at breaking point. Can't you feel it, too?

BARON [*to the* PRINCE]. Your Father will be waiting to see me, sir. And your chosen bride. Get her then.

PRINCE. The terms of the magic . . .

DANNY. Stick to them. The slipper fitted practically everyone except me and the unknown princess there.

PRINCE. In which case . . .
[*He goes to* MELANIE, *and takes her hand.*]
Will you come and meet my father?

MELANIE. I! But . . . are you sure?

PRINCE. From the moment we met.

MELANIE Oh . . . yes . . . but . . . yes . . . yes . . .
[*They move away a little to the right.* DANNY *crosses to* MELISSA.]

DANNY. Look, I know I'm under a cloud . . .

MELISSA. But not for long, I'm sure.

[*She gives him her hand, which he kisses. They move down left.* MELISSA *hesitates.*]

Then . . . must Cinderella be left alone?

CINDERELLA. Not Cinderella. Just Ella . . . your very silly sister.

[*There is a throb of far-off music, as the spell she set on herself breaks for good. She runs to* MELANIE *and then to* MELISSA, *and hugs them.*]

Be very happy. You should be!

[*She goes to* DAME MARGARET *and the* BARON, *and gives them a humble little curtsy.*]

Is it possible for you to forgive such stupidity?

BARON. Everyone's forgiven everything if they're truly sorry.

CINDERELLA. I truly am.

MARGARET. My dearest child! I'm so glad! I knew you were brave and sweet . . . but I feared you wouldn't find out until it was too late.

[*She kisses* CINDERELLA'S *forehead, and the girl smiles tearfully and turns away to come face to face with* BARNY.]

CINDERELLA. What a good thing you aren't a prince, Barny. I'd make a shocking queen.

[*She gives him her hands, thus rendering him almost totally incoherent.*]

BARNY. You . . . you'd make . . . you'd . . . make a splendid . . . you'd be very good . . . my . . . lady . . .

[*They stand still, looking at one another. The humans are all grouped in their pairs, entranced. The* FAIRY *comes down centre, followed by her* DEMON.]

FAIRY. My spells are all defeated!

[*But she is radiantly happy about it.*]

DEMON. No, my dear.
You said a happy ending, and it's here!
Nothing can matter if this much runs true
That Cinderella at the last wins through.
If not, why then the tale is truly tragic;
And we could give no aid, for all our magic.

FAIRY. You were a lot of help!

DEMON. I'm just a demon.
And this time I have had strange thoughts to dream on.
This legend has so many variations . . .
Different levels, and interpretations;
Oldest of all, yet ever new! The reason?
Another Cinderella's born each season.
Other glass slippers . . . coach . . . another Ball . . .

FAIRY. Oh, Smith, *I* like this version best of all!
[*She gives him her hands, which he accepts with wonder and humility. She also gives a little sniff and a gulp.*]
Dear Smith, now let us end our long vendetta.
My name . . .

DEMON. I know your name. It's Henrietta.
[*The* FAIRY *gives another small gulp.*]

FAIRY. This story . . . I'm not crying! It's . . . it's laughter! . . .
Let's stay inside it, happy ever after.

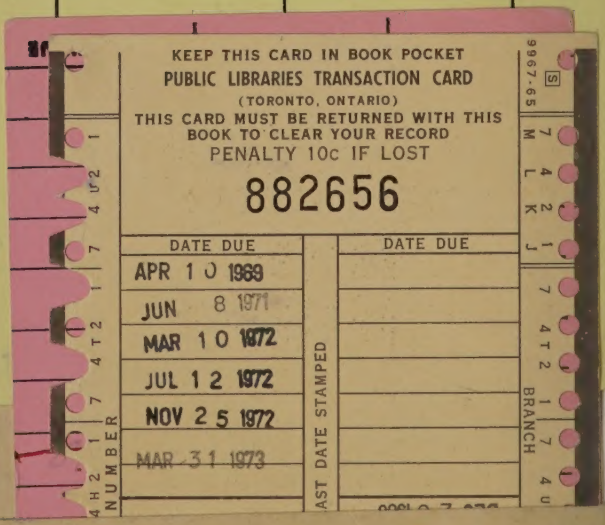
CURTAIN

DATE DUE

This book may be kept 21 days and may be renewed once.

A fine of 1 cent a day is charged, if the book is kept after the last date stamped below.

A fine of 5 cents a day is charged if the book is borrowed on an adult library card. No book issued while a fine remains unpaid.



FORM 121

R 166733

R 10

790-BAC-990